

RELIGION

A DISCOURSE IN REALIST PHILOSOPHY

Pradyot Kumar Mukhopadhyay



University of Calcutta

2014

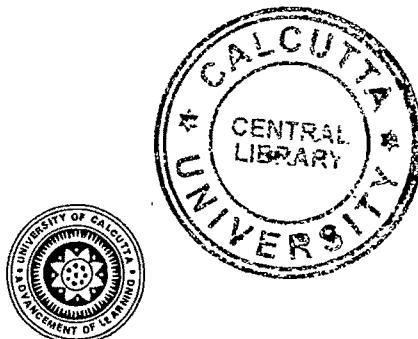
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DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR TO THE MEMORY

OF

Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya, Pañdit Pañcānan Śāstri,

Mm. Kalipada Tarkācārya, Pañdit Madhusudan Nyāyācārya and

Pañdit Narmada Tarkatīrtha

At the feet of whom he had the privilege of learning the

Philosophies and Culture of India

“Will you give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make
a comparison of Hinduism with the teachings of Christ? I will
be deeply grateful for the favour”

From the desk of the Head of the Department

It is a matter of great pride for us that the University of Calcutta has undertaken the publication of the book 'Religion: A Discourse in Realist Philosophy' by Pradyot Kumar Mukhopadhyay in the Centenary Year of the Department of Philosophy, Calcutta University. In the history of the University of Calcutta many endowment lectureships have been instituted. The present work is the outcome of a series of lectures delivered by the author, in connection with the prestigious Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Memorial Lectureship, during November 2012.

Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Memorial Lectureship was instituted in this University in the year 1919 with the help of generous donation from G.C. Ghosh, in memory of his deceased son Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh. The long list of eminent speakers who delivered this lecture in the past in our Department includes Professor A. Macdonell, Maurish A.Canny, Douglas C. Macintosh, C.J. Webb, Haridas Bhattacharyya, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Surendranath Dasgupta, Saroj Kumar Das, A.R. Wadia, Rai Bahadur Professor Khagendranath Mitra, Nalinikanta Brahma, George P.Conger, Sacchidananda Murthy, Bimal Krishna Matilal—to mention only a few. Professor P.K. Mukhopadhyay is the latest addition to this august list.

In the present work the author discusses 'Religion and some related issues' from the perspective of realist philosophy. No doubt this subject, as the author rightly points out, is 'very complicated and vast' but he deals with it in a masterly way. The problems of plurality and unity of religions, interfaith-conflict, conversion, re-conversion are discussed here and the author also makes an attempt to respond to the external challenges to religion in his inimitable style, the hallmarks of which are

logical rigour and precision. It is also remarkable that Professor Mukhopadhyay has taken upon himself the entire responsibility of editing this huge work in spite of his pressing academic assignments. The publication of this masterly treatise, I am sure, will go a long way in removing some misconceptions about the role of religion and researchers will immensely benefit from the publication of this work.

I, on behalf of the Department and myself, take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Suranjan Das, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of our University, for his relentless effort to revive the prestigious lectureship after a long gap and for kindly undertaking the publication of the book at the University Press.

My sincere thanks to all my esteemed colleagues for their unfailing support. Professor Aparna Banerjee and Professor Uma Chattopadyay certainly deserve special mention.

My heartfelt thanks to Professor Manidipa Sanyal, Dr. Krishna Chatterjee and Dr. Shyamasree Bhattacharyya for their whole hearted co-operation.

I owe a lot to my teacher Professor Subirranjan Bhattacharya for his aid, advice and encouragement.

I am thankful to Mr. Anjan Kumar Dan, Estate & Trust Officer of this University for his sincere help.

Finally my sincere thanks to Sri Pradip Kumar Ghosh, Superintendent and all other Staff of Calcutta University Press. Without their ungrudging help and co-operation it would have been well-nigh impossible to publish this volume in time.

Kolkata

22nd November, 2013

Sharmistha Bakshi

Department of Philosophy

University of Calcutta

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Preface

On the invitation from the University of Calcutta to deliver endowment lectures under its Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Memorial Lectureship Programme of the year, the author delivered in the Department of Philosophy of the university a course of eight lectures, between November 20 and 30, 2012. The present work is mainly an outcome of those lectures. According to the terms of the endowment the lecturer was supposed to choose as subject of his lectures what may be generally called religious themes and discuss them from “a standpoint of comparative religion”.

It is a pity that religion is not a core subject of mainstream academic courses of the departments of humanities or philosophy of Indian Universities. Sometimes some university departments of India offer courses in philosophy *and* religion and are named accordingly. The interposed conjunction relates the two subjects as much as it highlights their difference. It seems to show that we are more reluctant than willing to relate philosophy to religion. The audience also seem not to notice, or if they notice they think it excusable, if a scholar, after accepting the offer to lecture in the present course, speaks instead on philosophical, historical or such other topics of his current interest. It is considered enough if it could be shown that the topic is somehow, however indirectly or distantly, related to religion. We, however, resolved to speak almost exclusively and directly on religion or religion related themes. There were two major reasons. First, the decision was closely in accordance with the terms of the endowment. Secondly, the decision was informed by some noticeable changes that have occurred particularly in India in the post world war years. On the one hand religion and religion

related issues are now among the burning socio-political issues and, on the other hand, many academicians today have developed what may be called an ambivalent attitude to religion. In public life they remain rather shy about religious matters and do not openly speak much in favour of religion. But in their personal life they are inclined to align themselves with one religious order or another and find time and interest to study religious literature or listen to religious discourses of some kind. These changes are among the marks of liberal Hinduism which we hope to discuss in this work. Apart from the more familiar issues like interfaith conflict, we need to seriously discuss the conditions of the emergence of liberal Hinduism and its implications.

It may be found that we have somewhat deviated from the terms of the endowment. Instead of making comparative religion the preferred approach of our discussion we have turned it more into a subject of our discussion. We have been guided mainly by two considerations. For making comparative religion one's own standpoint, one must be clear about and state explicitly what is or should be understood by comparative religion. We just cannot begin by assuming that we know what it is or by accepting it in the received sense. Secondly the author is acutely aware of his own limitations and at the same time he is unable and unwilling to change the standard of requirements laid down in the terms of the endowment. In the beginning of the lectures he confessed that in his long span of life he came personally in contact with only one scholar who in his opinion could do complete justice to the subject of comparative religion. It is enormously difficult to achieve expertise in all the disciplines of knowledge mastery of which is needed in order to be well posted in the subject. Many studies, claimed to be from the standpoint of comparative religion, do not fulfill this requirements.

This work includes discussion on two themes which the author could not cover in his lectures due to time constraints. These are reconversion and acquiring religion by man; these are being discussed here in chapters six and ten respectively. Still many necessary things could not be discussed even though reference to some of them recurs throughout the book. One such theme is universal religion. Two third of the written materials produced between the delivery of the lectures and the finalizing of the manuscript could not be incorporated. The work remains so far an incomplete essay on the subject which figures in the title.. More serious defect is that the discussion of some of the topics may be found inadequate. The author could not foresee that the issues were more complicated and vast than he initially thought. The feeling of dissatisfaction due to such incompleteness is however compensated by the hope that the creative and discerning critics would not stop at pointing out such incompleteness but would be provoked to complete it. There are quite a few other defects. Some of them and also the reasons which induce them are matters of common knowledge. However these reasons can at the most explain why the defects are there they cannot justify their presence. So it needs to be recorded that Indian authors, including teachers of Indian universities rarely get office assistance to help them in preparing the press copy of the manuscript. If the situation were different they could publish many more quality works. Besides, these authors do not get adequate time which they need, making allowance for their various other commitments and lack of assistance, for finalizing the manuscript. There always seems to be wide divergence of opinion as to what should be the length of ‘reasonable time’ for the job and authors are generally believed to calculate it on the higher side. The defect that may appear most annoying to the readers is repetitions. Some

of them are due to reasons already stated. A few others are consciously retained. If the discussion of a point seemed necessary and natural at a certain portion of the text we did not always omit it on the ground that it was discussed previously. Nor did we make short of our job by simply incorporating cross references. First it disturbs the continuity of reading and secondly it does not allow the readers to pick out, prior to the study of the whole book, discussion on topics of their immediate interest. The number of repetitions still could be less if the manuscript could be prepared with greater competence and more time.

The author strongly feels the need to record his gratitude first to the Calcutta University and its present Vice-Chancellor Professor Suranjan Das. He is also very grateful to the Department of Philosophy and its present Head of the Department, Dr. Sharmistha Bakshi, who made great efforts to actually organize the lectures. She also displayed exemplary patience and consideration when the manuscript could not be handed over within ‘reasonable time’. However, her forbearance proved a greater and more effective pressure on the author otherwise the publication would have been further delayed. The invitation to deliver these lectures gave the author the opportunity to ponder over, seriously and in a sustained manner, some of the issues which he thought very relevant and important for him. He derived more benefit from the lectures than perhaps the audience. He got the opportunity to systematize his thoughts on some of the themes – a task which was repeatedly postponed in the past. He could also clarify to himself a number of points for the first time. The author is especially grateful to Professor Subirranjan Bhattacharya and Dr. Sharmistha Bakshi of the Department of Philosophy, University of Calcutta for showing their trust on his ability to do adequate justice to this prestigious lectureship programme of

the University. He is also grateful to Professor Aparna Banerjee of the same department for helping him to overcome many of his initial qualms and finally agree to accept the invitation to deliver the lectures under reference. She also noticed a number of mistakes in the draft of the 'Plan of Lectures' which the author sent in advance seeking corrections and suggestions. Later on also she helped the author in finalizing the manuscript. The author cannot adequately thank Professor Kashinath Saha and Dr. Snehanshu Mondal, both of the Department of Mechanical Engineering, Jadavpur University, first for sitting through all the eight lectures and secondly for helping him, during lectures, with some mechanical teaching aids. The author wishes to thank Mr. Dan, who on behalf of the Estate section of the University initiated the correspondences with the author and formally introduced him to the audience on the first day of the lecture.

The author is pleased to note that he felt greatly honoured because Professor Prabir Hui could keep author's request to him to be present in the lectures. He is also grateful to Professor Arun Bandyopadhyay who came to attend some of the lectures ignoring his busy schedule and more pressing duties. The author does not have adequate words to thank all the teachers and students from different colleges and universities who attended the lectures and contributed to the success of the programme by raising many important questions, initiating useful discussions, and making insightful comments. The author wants to take this opportunity to thank some of those who could not attend the lectures but received the copies of the manuscript along with the request for comments and suggestions. They are among those who always wanted the author to be academically active and thereby happy. To this category belong Professor Navjyoti Singh, Shrimati Anuradha Singh, Dr. Denise De Souza, Dr. Saccidananda Mishra, Shrimati Swati Bhattacharya and

Dr. Sukumar Chatterjee. I would also like to thank the numerous listeners who have been attending my course of lecture at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, which started sometimes in 2003 and is still continuing. Though I have not discussed so far in that course any one of the topics (except perhaps a bit of scientism) discussed here yet it is very likely that what I discussed there contributed substantially to shaping my current view and approach so far as the subject of religion is concerned. I am therefore indebted to the past and present management of the Institute and particularly to Swami Prabhananda who originally invited me to deliver this ongoing course of lectures at RMIC..

We allowed ourselves in these pages to compare and contrast certain features of different religions as an insider to a particular religion but with as much detachment as possible. It is quite likely that we have committed good many mistakes. In spite of our best efforts our judgments and assertions could not all be correct or well argued. For this we can be sincerely sorry and remain always ready to welcome corrections by others. At the end it is needless to say that if anything is found in this work which is correct and valuable then the author most certainly owes it to his teacher. It is equally needless to say that he alone is responsible for all mistakes and defects.

Varanasi

P.K. Mukhopadhyay

September, 2013

Part One: The Context

CHAPTER ONE

The Birth of Liberal Hinduism

This work – *Religion: A Discourse in Realist Philosophy* – mainly contains the materials of the eight lectures that were delivered between November 20 and 30, 2012 at the University of Calcutta under its Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Memorial Lectureship Programme of the year. In 1919 the donor, Mr. G. C. Ghosh, instituted this Lectureship at the University of Calcutta with the expressed wish that the lecturers would discuss “Theology, Religion or the Spirit of God, Man and Happiness from a standpoint of comparative religion”. Today, nearly one hundred years after, it is not unnatural for us to be curious if the donor’s plan of instituting this course of lectures or his selection of the subjects to be discussed was informed by the state of religion at the time and or conditions prevailing then in the local or global society.

The local society, India, or more particularly, Bengal, at that time was passing through, more or less simultaneously, about four major revolutionary movements. Of these the youngest, the national freedom movement, was the strongest around 1919. Men’s attention or interest was no longer strongly focused on the other three movements. Rabindranath even failed, a little later, to mention in his article¹, one of these three other movements in spite of the fact that he was once actively associated with it². The oldest of the four movements was the religious movement or religious reform movement. It was already in full swing in the early nineteenth century and in 1919, though still alive, it

had lost much of its earlier strength and urgency. Nonetheless the religious reform movement proved to be more effective than any one of the other three movements in that it contributed more than even the national freedom movement, say, to the shaping of the mind or mentality of the majority of the modern Indians. It is another matter, however, that this rather large scale transformation of the Bengali (and even Indian) mind and society cannot be said to be strictly authentic³. For one thing the changes in question did not come through any true awakening of the *people* of the country; nor can we say that these people consciously adopted the changes in consideration of their merit. Majority of the people adopted the changes because those were in vogue at the time. The leaders of the movement could not really effect the transformation of the Bengali mind in question by educating the masses. They could create, knowingly or unknowingly, only what may be called a certain (largely false) value and value sense in them.

The religious reform movement was not only initiated by but also remained confined to a few (differently) educated, urban elite or the intelligentsia of the time. (In this respect it remained largely different from the nationalist movement or freedom struggle. The latter, turned out to be, especially, under the leadership of Gandhi, a truly people's movement). As was shown by Professor Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya⁴ the educated young intellectuals of the time were a different caste by themselves with least or no rapport with the masses. The unsuspecting and sort of uneducated mass of Indian people were gradually made to believe, largely through propaganda of some kind or other, that the religious reform movement represented modern ideas and that modernity was a great virtue. Accordingly they wanted to be

known or recognized by others as modern and progressive even though they had no knowledge or understanding about the real nature or source of this modernity. The modernity in question consisted mainly in the negative and destructive attitude or stance towards the religious tradition of the country.

There is no denying the fact that many leaders of the religious reform movement, were, in their personal life and belief, truthful and sincere; many were even conservative and sober in comparison to their later followers. This is further confirmed by the fact that there were many differences among the leaders themselves with whom we associate what is generally described as the religious reform movement and which proved to be the precursor of modern renascent India.

We can detect a number of different lines of thinking and activities about the religion of the Hindus during the movement in question. From the beginning there were two groups of people – the pro-reform and anti-reform – and within each group there were differences of opinion. It should be remembered that, contrary to popular belief all pro-reform men were not the most learned or the best thinkers of the time and all anti-reform men were not ill informed or biased. Be that as it may, during the modern⁵ religious reform movement of India Hinduism was made to encounter many challenges and criticisms not only from stray individuals but also from sort of organized bodies of individual. The anti reform thinkers were also divided and could not offer, or even thought of offering, collective resistance to the reformers. Among the anti-reform people there were traditional scholars and committed practitioners of Hinduism who were easily recognized as orthodox Hindus. However, there were also many

modern university educated scholars and thinkers who were against reform. These modern men, generally unorganized, came out with authentic responses to modern critiques of Hinduism either because they were opposed to reform of Hinduism as such or because they found the thoughts and arguments of the concerned reformers untenable. Many of them expressed their anti-reform views as individuals and not as members of any organized body or movement. Professor K. C. Bhattacharya was one of the best examples.⁶ These men, the modern English educated anti-reform individuals, may still be described by the common phrase, modern traditionalist (in contrast to the other group or type of people who are in fact described as traditional modernizers). Even though some of them like Sri Aurobindo, turned out to be the founder (or the main inspiration behind the founding) of some great organization, yet it is true to say that the modern traditionalists did not form a single group of anti reform individuals and were not organized.

The zeal to reform Hinduism, on the part of a large section of modern educated (pro-reform) Indians, took precedence, it seems, over their nationalism. This became the model or representative attitude of renaissance Indians. In this sense the religious reform movement turned out to be the major shaper of the modern Indian mind.

Among the major markers of Indian modernity since then are first the view that India is primarily and essentially a religious culture and second the view that Hinduism being practised at the time was in urgent need of reform. The reformers were not, as we said, all of the same opinion and there lines of thinking were different. One line of thinking, the oldest one, that emerged in the wake of the activities of

the Christian missionaries in particular, took the form of, at least in appearance, internalizing (by a group of modern religious reformers of India) some of the actual and possible criticisms against Hinduism by the followers of those Semitic religions that came in direct contact with Hinduism (as it was being believed and practised by the majority of the Indians of the time⁷). The leaders of the religious movement who proceeded along this line convinced themselves that, (as the Semites held), Hinduism, in its the then form at least, was marked by the presence of polytheism and idolatry in it; and these were among the strong marks of inferior religion. The impact of the sort of thinking which influenced the deistic and pietistic movements of Christian Europe and what is called the medieval Bhakti movement of India also contributed to their becoming unrelenting critics of rituals, priesthood and the like. They preferred an intellectual approach to religion appropriate for the religion of the head (or a devotional/emotional approach to religion appropriate for the religion of the heart⁸). The other approach, the conservative approach of the greater section of the practicing Hindus of the time, often described as ritualistic approach, which was closely associated with the religion of law, did not suit the taste and temperament of the modern (pro-reform) Indians. These reformers thought that Hinduism of the time was primarily or unduly ritualistic and as such had no appeal for either the rationally oriented intellectuals or emotionally oriented theistic devotees. In short, more radical among the modern Indian religious reformers were convinced that the criticisms of the Semitic missionaries against Hinduism were just. What strengthened their conviction was the large scale depravity among the practicing Hindus and the social conditions of particularly

low caste Hindus and of the womenfolk of the time. Anyway, these reformers were officially convinced that Hinduism was an inferior religion not only by the standard of the non-idolatrous Semitic religions but also by the standard of modern scientific rationality which showed that the religion of the Hindus, when it was not a form of esoteric mysticism, was a form of irrational, exploitative, and superstitious ritualism.

The most radical among the Indian religious reformers thus internalized the major criticisms of the foreign critics who belonged to Semitic religions and simultaneously brought their experience of European modernity and rationality to bear on their religious views and practices on the one hand and their attitudes to religion as such or Hinduism in particular on the other. In their personal life they had only two options. They could become confirmed atheist or continue with their religious beliefs and practices just as a matter of habit without any commitment or concern. When they turned reformer, a public stance, their agenda of religious reform could not but be mainly negative.

*

When the leaders of the religious reform movement were led to critiquing Hinduism in the wake of missionary activities of some Semites, there was also an upsurge of nationalism⁹, in some form, among many of them. For, their national and cultural dignity was hurt when their religion was criticized as comparatively inferior by some foreigners who happened to be the followers of different religions.¹⁰ Most probably being informed by the need to reconcile their allegiance to national culture and dignity with their critique of Hinduism,¹¹ these leaders of

religious reform in India adopted a less radical and more positive stance. These non-radical reformers came to believing and or saying that the valid criticisms against Hinduism (in their own case at least) did not apply to or directed against Hinduism as such. Those were directed against or applicable to the decadent form of Hinduism of the time. Even the radical anti-reform modern thinkers of the period could not perhaps deny that the Hinduism of the time was not in its best form. However the non-radical reformers considered that aberration of religion was not confined to Hinduism alone; religion of almost every culture undergoes such a stage at some point of time. There was nothing, they thought, to be so upset about the decadence of Hinduism. The need was to initiate without wasting time some positive programme of salvaging the true and proper Hinduism from its deviant and debased current state, from the debris of ritualism, to use the words of Rabindranath Tagore. Accordingly these thinkers and or activists got themselves involved in the modern religious reform movement.

Many members of this second group of reformers suggested that for salvaging proper Hinduism there was need to look into the true spirit and meaning of the Hindu scripture with which, they believed, the actual beliefs and practices of the Hindus of the time were not in full accord. Hinduism enshrined in the beliefs and practices of the majority Hindus of the time was an aberration of the true religion of the Hindus. There was quite an amount of truth in this remark. The suggestion was also quite perceptive. If it were properly implemented then there would have happened at least a literary renaissance – a great surge of genuine interest in the Veda and related literature of the old. This would have resulted in an all round effort on the part of the Hindus to retrieve old

texts of the scripture and scriptural literature and commentaries on them followed by authentic study and research in the area. Soon there would have been a good number of Hindus with authentic understanding of the Vaidika culture and correct knowledge of the real import of the Veda and the related literature. The programme of salvaging the true religion of the Hindus would have been successful. Unfortunately almost nothing of the sort happened.

What actually happened instead was that they, and under their influence and teaching many others, adopted and propagated the European or the Orientalist theory of the nature, structure and teaching of the Veda and the texts of the Vaidika corpus. The Hindu religious Scripture or the Veda is a vast corpus of literature which included, according to the modern European thinkers and their Indian pupils (among whom are included this group of sober reformers) temporally and thematically disparate texts. If the earlier literature or parts of the Veda stressed rituals the later literature or parts of the Veda, known as the Upaniṣad, emphasized religion of experience (*anubhava*). The earlier religion of law which put almost exclusive emphasis on outward formalities and conformity to set patterns of external behavior was a form of primitive religion. The later texts of the Upaniṣad however taught the higher or even the highest form of religion.

The more positive and less radical reformers succeeded in making the following view hugely popular particularly among the modern Indians whose modernity consisted largely in uncritically accepting, in a docile manner, to borrow a phrase of K. C. Bhattacharya, the views and vocabularies of the Europeans. It was came to be believed that the Hinduism of the Vaidika period was primitive, ritualistic,

Polytheistic, idolatrous and in a word very inferior. It was replaced in the age of the Upaniṣad by a much higher form of Hinduism free from the said defects which were also the points of criticism of the Semitic missionaries. Again in the middle age the earlier Vaidika inferior religion was revived by a section of ignorant or artful men. What the foreign missionaries targeted was actually this revived Primitive Hinduism. Their criticisms did not apply to the proper and developed Hinduism of the Upaniṣad.

This strategy of distinguishing two forms of Hinduism allowed the second group of modern Indian religious reformers to be more positively and patriotically oriented without compromising, they at least thought so, their modernity and allegiance to rationalism. To avoid confusion these reformers introduced the practice of using the expressions of *vaidika* (or Vedic) Hinduism and Upanisadic Hinduism to refer to the earlier and later forms of Hinduism respectively. This was done on the basis of their assumption, derived from the modern European scholars of the Veda and *vaidika* literature, that the Veda was actually a term collectively applied to a large number of *temporally* and *thematically* disparate texts. The vaidika culture of the vast period of time called the Vaidika age was no unitary culture. The reform agenda of this second group of less radical and more positive reformers was to recover or revive the most developed form of the Hindu religion, the spiritualistic upanisadic Hinduism¹² and replace the current religion, the revived Vaidika religion of the Hindus, by it. When successfully carried out this would be proper corrective, the reformers thought, of the misdeed of the depraved and largely ignorant priestly class who was responsible for the revival, in the middle age, of the pre-Upanisadic

Hinduism which was really vulnerable to the modern scientific and Semitic criticisms.¹³ This was the beginning of the emergence of liberal Hinduism.

This second group of reformers appeared¹⁴ so far to be the internal critics of Hinduism who followed a line different from the more negative approach of the more radical group. It was believed that the radicals could do little more than sort of accept rather than assimilate the views of the Semitic missionaries and lost all hope for Hinduism or even religion for that. The sober group of reformers by contrast was not dismissive of Hindu religion as such. Nonetheless they maintained their difference from the *orthodox* or pre-modern Hindus who they thought missed or ignored the message of the *Upaniṣad*. They thus opted for a middle position between orthodox Hindus represented by the priestly class who were opposed to any type of reform of Hinduism and the aggressive missionaries of the Semitic religions and their Indian students who were practically dismissive of Hinduism as such. They felt the need to replace the revived ritualism of the Vaidika Hinduism not by any form of alien religion or concerned beliefs and practise but by the Upanisadic religion of the Hindus which the priestly class did not allow, due to their ignorance or some other sinister design, the people to know or practise. The difference of the means and goals of these two groups of reformers was important. The non-radical reformers consented to reforming Hinduism on the belief that the Upanisadic Hinduism was just the religion which the current Hinduism would turn out to be when it was reformed for all their radicalism the reformers of the other group could hardly have a better religion than Hinduism of the later Vaidika age.

This may all be laudable otherwise but could not be regarded as salvaging Hinduism proper and initiating literary renaissance. It was actually implementing the views of India, Indian religion and literature, which the European scholars and laity had. The view of the scholarly and committed Hindus of the time was never considered; no great effort was made to really master the corpus of the Vedic literature in its entirety and as true insiders to Hindu religion and culture. First a sort of fanciful division was made in the Vaidika corpus from the preferred developmental and philological points of view of the modern European scholars in total disregard of the view of the traditional indigenous scholars of great erudition (some of them were still active in the first half of the twentieth century). Only selected portions of the vast corpus of the Vaidika literature and the teachings contained therein were highlighted. For these seemed to tally with their pre-conceived notion of Hinduism and the *Veda* derived from alien sources. They not only studied only selectively the *Veda* and the Vaidika literature but also they could not produce even a single great argument or any comprehensive new interpretation or commentary which could decisively prove their view and vision of India to be correct or disprove those of the classical or modern traditionalists. Instead they simply ignored in the religion and literature of the Hindus which they did not like or produced at the most some rhetoric in highly emotional and persuasive prose against the true and traditional Hinduism in the eyes of the wise insiders. (We have no scope here to discuss particular and exceptional cases like Dayananda Sarasvati or Karapatriji).

There were many other differences among the religious reformers of modern India. Some were more strictly and exclusively

theoretical as compared to others who were viewed as great social and religious activists (also). Again some pro as well as anti-reform people of India were founders or members of some organized group or institution while others remained, even when otherwise influential, independent and largely stray individuals. Some held that from a strictly rational and scientific point of view there was no great or important difference between the pre-Upanisadic and Upanisadic Hinduism; both were religions of *faith*. However some non-radical reformer strongly claimed that the Upanisadic Hinduism or Vedānta dharma was quite scientific. Some of the people of this latter group are regarded as founders of a sort of new religion whether or not they themselves made such claim. It is already clear that the presence of reformers of different hues and persuasions made the religious reform agenda as well as the modern scenario of the religious India quite complicated.

Among the radical reformers of Hinduism the more sharp and serious ones tended to become in all appearance confirmed atheists or non-believers. Some other people remained equally radical critics of Hinduism in thought but in practice they preferred to remain rather indifferent to religious issues and continued to live the life of practising Hindu merely as a matter of habit and without any commitment or concern for their religion.¹⁵ There were a rare few among the radical critics of Hinduism who willingly converted to some other religion. The agenda of the non radical reformers of Hinduism was more positive. They remained committed to religious life and a firm believer in the value of religion. Some started sort of *new religion* which, however, they claimed, was in essence the true and developed form of the religion of the land though forgotten long before by the larger section of the

Hindus. The mass of Hindu population viewed these so called new religions as emergence of new sects of the liberal Hindus. The other non radical critics of Hinduism dropped many beliefs and practices of the Hindus of the time as irrational and unimportant or even harmful from strictly religious point of view. What remained of old Hinduism after such reform was a better religion whether or not it was envisaged by the Hindus of the past as a possible form of Hinduism. It did not matter much for these reformers whether the conservative and traditional Hindus recognized their new religion as better and reformed Hinduism. They were convinced that the 'new' religion was better and they often gave new name to it (and also to the people who followed it). It was of no real concern if this new religion was largely a continuation of old Hinduism as it was enshrined in the age old scripture and practices of the Hindus. The real import and teaching of the scripture were themselves matters of doubt and debate. Many new and often imaginary interpretations of the basic Hindu scripture were offered which differed substantially from those offered or accepted by the traditional scholars.

There were also great intellectuals who were not convinced that the new interpretations in question were correct. They even questioned the genuineness of the purpose of these reformers or the correctness or depth of their understanding of scriptures. However, the most rational beliefs and opinions of these great intellectuals and theoreticians about Hinduism and about the real teachings of the Hindu scriptures were considered by the reformers as conservative, orthodox, biased, and reactionary. Hardly there was any good reason for considering them to be so except that their thoughts in question were largely positive and

different from the new interpretations of scriptures provided by the modern reformers.

There were also men who consciously chose to remain quite indifferent to all talks and activities of reform of Hinduism (though they had firsthand knowledge of all modern efforts in this direction). They continued with their usual practices and beliefs without apology or vengeance. Even the most radical critics of religion in general or of Hinduism in particular could not miss the genuineness of some of these godly men as believing and practicing religious persons within Hinduism¹⁶. These godly men were generally and publicly acknowledged to belong to the class of the greatest and most noble religious personalities of the world of all time. However, some of the followers of such great religious personalities directed the greater part of their attention and activity to social reform and service. This sect of the liberal Hindus received great admiration and many followers from people of the country. But these followers or their immediate preceptor could hardly present any consistent system of belief or practice. Their admiration for the teachings of the *Upaniṣad* was limitless; they even believed that the *Upaniṣad* taught the universal religion based on the noblest principles which could be the foundation of universal morality and a just egalitarian society. This dharma they sometimes called Vedānta dharma, which in its turn is close to its earlier avatāra like *Vedāntpratipādya satyadharma*¹⁷ or *Brahmadharma*. In practice they found this universal dharma to be quite consistent with some idolatrous practices of the classical Hinduism. Another feature is that the founder and the follower of this Vedānta dharma introduced a cult of liberal sannyāsīns and missionary activity. In terms of its popularity it can be

regarded as the representative of liberal Hinduism which falls under the non radical religious reform movement of modern India. We had shown above that liberal Hinduism started as a project of salvaging lost Hinduism ; but what it achieved was installing a Hinduism of their own understanding in disregard of the views of great indigenous scholars and personalities and in preference to what they learnt from foreign people which sometimes they mistook as their independent thinking.

The section of the reformers of both radical and non-radical type who were more scholarly and academic (as distinct from the activists) confined themselves to just re-reading and reinterpreting India's religious literature including Purāṇa-s, Itihāsa-s, dharmaśāṁhitā-s etc. and publishing the findings in the form of books and journal articles and pamphlets.¹⁸ This was a way of educating people and creating authentic base of the genuine reform movement which could be considered as the movement from within the culture or the country itself. The effort was good but it could not immediately succeed. For modern and largely alien system of education introduced in Indian colleges and Universities in the nineteenth century was not at all suited for the purpose whereas the indigenous system of education was largely marginalized or discontinued. It however needs to be recorded that a few of the modern Indians acquired vast scholarship in the Hindu corpus of religious literature and their writings displayed critical appreciation and admiration of the tradition and creatively independent thinking. They were a class by themselves among the modern Indians who were concerned with the culture and religion of the Hindus.¹⁹

Those few however who became themselves reformed mostly under the influence of European thought and education established new

religions and religious groups like Brāhmaśamāj, Āryasamāj, Prārthanāsamāj, and the like. Soon there was split (actually a number of splits) within these newly established religions or religious groups. For example within one such group in Bengal some faction was more nationalist²⁰, some more Christianized²¹ and a third group returned back to the sort of (rather idolatrous) Hinduism which they earlier deserted to join or form Brāhmañdharma.²² Some of the religiously important differences among these groups of men were compatibility between the practice of universal or Vedānta dharma and the ‘rituals’ like idol worship or worship of one’s own guru (which were banned in Brāhmañdharma). Those who were not convinced that the rituals of sectarian religion could be combined with the doctrine of universal religion came to believe that the followers of the Vedānta dharma did not follow in practice what they taught in their theory. Nonetheless these points are no longer debated these days. They got accepted though their conceptual foundation seems to be weak if not faulty. Equally weak is the claim of some liberal Hindus that the modern liberal Hindu dharma or Vedānta dharma can rid the world of its various predicaments including violence and interfaith conflict.

All the developments and changes described so far had already taken place and shape in Bengal at least some fifteen years before the present lectureship was instituted in the University of Calcutta. Reform of Hinduism, or relationships, often strained, among many new religions or factions within some single one of them were no longer burning social or religious issues in the latter half of the first quarter of the twentieth century. Institution of the lectureship therefore does not seem to have been informed by the interfaith conflict in India during the

nineteenth century. The movements and dissensions hinted at above could hardly be regarded as anything comparable to violent interfaith conflicts of the past which were perpetrated mainly by the Semites. The phenomenon of post world war violence resulting from religious fundamentalism was yet a matter of the future. So the religious reform movement of India of the immediate past or the problem of religious fundamentalism of distant past or not so distant future might not have been the considerations that led the donor to institute the present its appearance in the terms of the endowment for the lectureship. It may not be unfair to think that the donor believed that there was some strong and close relationship between religion and human happiness. In moments of great personal grief and loss many men turn quite naturally to religion for peace and happiness. It will be quite in fitness of things if we (in these lectures) closely examine and seriously reflect on the lectureship. It seems that the donor had some more general consideration in mind. Could human happiness be that consideration? The theme of happiness makes relationship between religion and human happiness. We do not propose to discuss this theme directly but we are informed in our approach to problems to be dealt with in the lectures and hence in the book by the Mahābhārata theme that much of social and worldly sufferings are in fact reflected sufferings. We suffer largely because we make religion suffer by our thoughts, deeds and policies. To put it differently and more aptly for our purpose here, we even suffer from religion because we first brought suffering to religion. Though it should not have been unknown to us yet the fact is that we scarcely remember, remain explicitly aware of, some of the relevant teachings of classical India and of the works like the Mahābhārata. It has

been taught that in one of its dimensions human suffering is a case of reflected suffering. We almost exclusively discuss today the sufferings brought to human life and society *by* religion. It does not usually occur to us that religion only brings suffering to man when it has been first made to suffer in the hands of worldly beings²³. You harm the religion and thereby bring harm to yourself. However, this theme of challenges to religion was nowhere even hinted at in the terms of the endowment in question. Even today it is neglected and is almost completely pushed out of our sight. We pay exclusive attention to the challenges *from* religion. Human happiness seems to be the first casualty in the wake of interfaith conflicts of the past and present as well as violent religious fundamentalism of today. This is the reason why we plan to discuss, when we discuss today the issues like theism, religion, and human happiness from the perspective of comparative religion, the challenges to religion from scientism, socialism and pragmatism. Many seem to think that the state sponsored secularism or secularism of rational individuals is the only option we have if we are to keep alive the hope, let alone actualize it, of a just egalitarian human society marked by human solidarity and happiness. There, is no other way to avoid sufferings resulting from religion or factors relating to religion. It may be noted here incidentally that we could avoid the discussion of some of the issues including the modern issue of human happiness if we decided to treat religion from the point of view of only *descriptive* comparative religion. We feel it necessary to reflect philosophically on comparative religion and avoid the usual practice of doing comparative religion without comparative assessment.

Religion is old, though still very much alive, but we belong to the present. We can hardly be indifferent to certain issues and debates arising particularly in the wake of the state sponsored secularism on the one hand and atheistic socialism and pragmatism on the other. There are also the problems associated with the religion as is being practiced in and with the support of some theocratic state and Government in some parts of the world. We need to be clear also about the concept of universal religion and various claims made on its behalf if we are not to fall easy prey to soft spiritualism of some of the liberal Hindus of modern India. We need to maintain distance from it as much as from scientism etc. Courting realism and dualism seems to us to be one, if not the only, reasonable option we have.

The act of relating religion to human happiness brings in its wake the association of conflicting emotions of hopes and frustrations arising from a sense of fulfillment, loss or deception, as the case may be. This is one among many factors why religion is a matter of abiding concern, unresolved debate, ever inalienable feature of human history and culture. In this connection we would like to note two important developments that took place in India after 1919 and which bear marks of prevalence or even dominance of liberal Hinduism. Both these changes relate to religion. Today we hear and talk more about reconciliation and compatibility between religion and science. But even during 1960s Indians used to hear and talk more about conflict between the two. Most familiar view was that religion was not possible in the age of science. This belief, view or mood was so dominant that publisher and/or editor of a journal of science and engineering institution would

refuse to publish a paper for the simple reason that the contention of the author of the paper was that the thesis of incompatibility between science and religion had not been proved scientifically or rationally²⁴. Today since 1970s great many men feel sanguine that science and religion can be and can be understood to be compatible with each other. The credit for this change goes in large measure to the liberal Hindus. But as usual they are more explicit and enthusiastic in expressing their hope but not half so careful in finding or stating rational basis of the same.²⁵ Be that as it may, this change in attitude and mood relates to religion as such. The second change relates to religion in its plurality. Today we hear much more about harmony of religions, universal religion and spirituality than we used to hear about them before 1960s. This shows that people including the intellectuals have become more hopeful that we could have both religion on the one hand and a just and egalitarian human society. The theme of religious harmony or the compatibility between science and religion is not unrelated to the theme of religious reform. For the advocates of the theses of harmony and compatibility, particularly in Bengal, hold, if their writings are to be believed, that if there was ever any incompatibility of science with religion or conflict between religions then the reference was to sectarian religions in which class they include the conventional Hinduism that was being practiced by the people of India for many centuries or more. But now that Vedānta or Vedānta dharma has been discovered to be the essence of Hinduism proper by the moderate and positively oriented reformers, and it is a universal and rational religion,

conflict between science and religion on the one hand and interfaith conflict or disharmony of religions on the other may soon be things of the past.²⁶ So far the two changes in question are related and they largely define the characteristic thinking and approach of liberal Hinduism which took its birth during the modern reform movement in the field of religion in India which began in the nineteenth century and continued (though in a much diminished form) even in the early years of the twentieth century. Today liberal Hinduism is very popular in India, thanks to the publicity of it by some dedicated members of this form of Hinduism. Outside India its presence is being felt to some extent especially through the activities of the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Some think this liberal Hinduism is a challenge to Hinduism. Under its original programme of salvaging Hinduism proper, the liberal Hindus have made popular a Hinduism made to order, a Hinduism of their liking and making. One deviation from Hinduism is easily noticeable. According to Hinduism religion is our protector but according to the reformers of religion including the members of liberal Hinduism we have assumed the role of the protector of religion.²⁷ Can philosophy help sorting out these matters?

CHAPTER TWO

Philosophy and Religion

Religion has many dimensions and it can be (and has been in the past) discussed from many different perspectives. We propose to discuss it from the perspective of a realist philosophy. A part, only a part, of the discussion of religion from this perspective will take the form of philosophical reflections on the idea and practice of comparative religion. It is a difficult job since the real expertise in the field of comparative religion is not easy to achieve. Some go further and hold that the possibility or utility of discussing religion is, in a sense, more doubtful and debatable today than ever before. Apart from this rather historical observation there is a theoretical objection also. Some think that it is impossible to discuss religion from a philosophical perspective (and hence from the perspective of a realist philosophy) since by nature they are opposed to each other. Any attempt to study religion philosophically would be like trying to observe darkness by lighting a lamp. The only thing that a philosophy of religion can reasonably do, on this view, is to show that religion is not amenable to philosophical treatment. The nominalist theory of universal is a similar case; it shows that there is no such thing as (objective) universal to be discussed. This seems to explain, some think, why religion occupies (arguably) only a peripheral position in the mainstream philosophy. Even if we admit that the above contention of the skeptics is true, 'philosophy of religion' will still serve some purpose; it will have at least some negative use. The skeptics may insist that even if the consequence of their contention proves negative for religion (or even philosophy of religion), for the

human society, local as well as global, the consequence would be positive and beneficial. It is a well known fact that the belief and practice of religion have been the source of many social evils and human sufferings. Philosophy of religion can show that from the perspective of rational and critical inquiry there is in fact no such thing as religion. The so-called religious beliefs and practices have no basis in reality but are matters of mere subjective feeling and emotion of naive, unsuspecting or misguided mass of people. Utilizing their innocence vested interest in society used this religion as a tool for exploiting them. If philosophy or philosophy of religion can show this clearly then it will render a great service to whole humanity. Such revelation will go a long way to rid human society of evils of ignorance, exploitation, violence and consequently of many familiar sufferings. The idea about religion and about the value of philosophy of religion just described is commonly derived from scientism on the one hand and some socialist teachings on the other. This way of looking at religion is quite popular among those who think themselves modern, rational and progressive. However, we are convinced that it is yet to be proved beyond doubt that philosophical study of religion is either a non-starter – there is no point in studying it – or it should be undertaken not so much for some theoretical gain in the first instance but for justifying some preconceived socio-political stance. This will be clear as we proceed.

There are, in addition, at least the following three considerations, advanced by different groups of people, which, we think, give the present project a good start. (i) It is on record that authentic and explicit claim has been made to the effect that religion is extremely useful and important. It had been so earlier and it is especially so today²⁸, even though many think that it has become

useless, unnecessary or even impossible in the scientific age. (ii) Empirical survey and statistical report show that the attitude to religion of the majority of contemporary men (not excluding the educated and discerning ones) all over the world is at the most one of ambivalence; they are certainly not dismissive of religion. (iii) Religion is not useless in the sense that it is not a force to reckon with or that we can ignore it. It is even ‘useful’ but only in a negative way. Its pernicious influence on man and society can hardly be missed. It or its influence needs must be challenged or resisted both theoretically by thinkers like philosophers and practically by the social and political activists (and policy makers).

These considerations, in themselves mutually incompatible, are so serious, particularly the last one, that it is not possible for any responsible man, and particularly philosopher, to ignore them. So we cannot straight away write off philosophy of religion or religion for the matter of that. Religion is still an open issue and some of the debates about it need to be reopened and further developed. The present work may be deemed useful if it can succeed in doing this. We do not envisage that, beyond this, we would be able to offer final solution to any one of the issues to be discussed here or find absolute truth in any related matters.

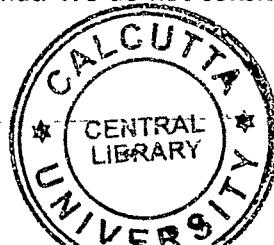
In support of the first consideration, we might quote at random from as diverse sources as the Mahābhārata, conversations of Moulana Abul kalam Azad, and writings of persons like Vivekananda, Woodroffe and many others. Though we may actually cite some of them in course of our discussion yet quotations by themselves are of little help. To every quotation on any subject there may be found another quotable passage which says just the opposite. We should therefore begin by accepting each of the three considerations as possibly true and as

deserving our close consideration. None of them can or should be simply dismissed out of hand. Anyway, till one has conclusively disproved it, which we think it is not possible to do, the implication of the first consideration (or of the first two) – that religion was very useful, at least sometimes in the past, and it has not been finally proved to have become of no use as yet – is that our proposed inquiry, investigation or discussion cannot fall through due to the lack of subject matter. Taken together the three considerations imply that it is controversial to hold that religion is no longer as useful as it might have been once. If the world is to progress we should not allow ourselves to live in the past, however glorious it might have been, ignoring the present. We need to rid the world of all negative and disruptive forces, of which religion is alleged to be one, and take determined strides forward to making our future as we want it to be. If, however, we are a little cautious, it may not seem to be the only or the immediate option before us.

Though the views do not agree about the uselessness of religion in the past, they seem to incline us to believing that religion is not useful (or that useful) today. Can we begin from here? We need to consider why or how religion has become positively useless or less useful today. On the view that it was useful before, or even independent of that, religion could not have become useless or less useful if certain factors did not render it ineffective or weak (in the mean time). It is held that the state of religion today is like that of technology. It is not necessarily evil but it has been rendered harmful by the people in whose hand it is.²⁹ It is not science or technology per se which is harmful; but it is the captive technology – the innovations in which or the application of

which, is being monitored and controlled thoroughly by the industries. It is for this reason that technology is proving today to be so dangerous.²⁹ We cannot throw away the baby with the bath water. Critics might still say that despite its look the rejoinder is lame. If it had no deficiency in it then nothing could have succeeded in weakening religion. This is, however, a patently bad argument; it is in fact an analytic statement in the guise of an argument. There is an equally bad way of defending religion which would result in uttering some suitable subjunctive conditional. The fact is that the greater section of the people are incapable of critically examining and understanding the problematic situation and it is very easy to mislead these unsuspecting simple minds by false propaganda and persuasive rhetoric. We suspect that this has happened in large measure in the case of religion. Philosophy has today the daunting task of clearing the confusions around religion and many related issues. If philosophers and philosophy professionals address this problem successfully then they will render a great service to society and humanity at large. History is witness to the fact that men in the past were misled in ethical matters. A well known philosopher said that a philosophical theory of morals was not necessary to make men moral – which in any case it could not do – but only to save them from the seductive influences of bad (moral) philosophies.³⁰ We think that the situation is similar in case of religion.

At this stage one may object that our account of religion in this work is unlikely to be neutral. The general tone of our discussion so far suggests that our account is predetermined to be pro religion. We admit that we would consciously present here an insider's account of religion, even a largely personal account of it at that. We do not consider it any



demerit. There is difference between a personal account and an idiosyncratic account. Further, authenticity, which is more difficult to achieve for an outsider, is no less a virtue than objectivity or neutrality. When absolute neutrality is a chimera the best thing which one can have, and what we aspire for, is a combination of adequate or optimal objectivity with similar authenticity.

To return to the question of weakened religion, we need to explain how it has been rendered weak. We think that three major challenges, one each from scientism, socialist ideology and pragmatism, are largely responsible for the current weakness of religion. There may be and are many other challenges but we propose to discuss briefly only these three. A part of the agenda of the realist philosophers is to turn the challenges into opportunities, the opportunity to critically examine and objectively decide if religion still has vitality, if its potentialities are not yet completely exhausted. (This approach is vastly different from the dogmatic response which some theists and liberal Hindus formulated in subjunctive conditional statements spoken of above.) To anticipate, our investigation so far reaffirms what the Mahābhārata said long back that we destroy religion at our peril; and the devils know that the sure way to destroy the world is to destroy religion.³¹

The three major challenges in question seem to come usually from those who are at least officially outsiders to religion. By deciding to begin with them we consciously want to reverse the more familiar approach, which over emphasizes the challenges that religion allegedly brings to society. From this point of view religion is viewed, as one of the major sources of many social evils; it brings untold miseries to humanity, belies its own promise to bring happiness to mankind. By

reversing this familiar approach and its standard view and priority, we propose to discuss the matter from the side of religion itself, from inside the religion, and give priority to the question what challenges have been brought to religion and what harm we did to it in the past or are still doing.

The three major challenges to religion we will discuss do not make any essential reference to plurality of religions. They target religion as such. Even if there were only one religion in the world these challenges still could be offered. However, plurality of religions, which is a necessary presupposition (besides being a given fact) of the discipline of comparative religion, will figure largely and at different points in our proposed discussion. The challenges which apply to religion as such would also apply to any particular religion. In this sense they do not entail the denial of plurality of religions, though they do not presuppose religious diversity. It is not easy to deny plurality of religions either, as it is a stark fact of common experience and most potent source of today's many burning problems like interfaith violence, separatism, religious discrimination etc. The points at which our discussion will involve essential reference to plurality of religions include religious conversion, reconversion³² and comparative assessment of religions. In this context we need to remember that whatever may be true of religion as such, the possibility and utility of discussing religion in general, cannot automatically apply to religion taken in its plurality. Plurality of religions tends to diminish, according to some, the value of religion but not necessarily the value of the study and discussion of religion. Rather this plurality or the problems generated by it makes discussion of religion more necessary and urgent. Religious diversity, which contributed to the current weakness and degradation of religion, is regarded as a challenge to religion from within.

Some discerning people believe that it is not religion but the multiplicity of it or some of the consequences of this multiplicity which have made religion weak and harmful. Religious diversity may be found religiously less important but socially most harmful. A weakened religion tends to undermine the very foundation of society. It is the chief reason why human society today is unjust, exploitative and unprogressive. It also frustrates man's effort to achieve a peaceful, egalitarian and just society.

This is how majority of people think today. Working philosophers are also social beings. The conflict of religions and the resulting menace of separatism, violence etc. should be as great and urgent a matter of concern for them (as distinct from the mystics' perhaps) as the traditional matters usually discussed in mainstream *academic* philosophy (of religion) such as (i) the nature, source and truth of religious beliefs, (ii) theoretical meaningfulness of religious sentences and language, (iii) the possibility of rationally proving the existence of God and (iv) reconciling His properties of eternity, agency and kindness with the existence of natural evils in the world. So one of the urgent questions to ask today, and which we constantly ask ourselves, is can philosophy help solving or containing religious conflicts and violence. We believe it can³³, though in its own way and not in the way of the socio-political activists, say. To illustrate we can cite the example of interfaith conflict. Philosophers unlike others will not fail to draw the distinction between the necessary and sufficient conditions of events like interfaith conflict. They can find more easily that even if plurality of religions is a necessary condition of interfaith conflict it cannot be said to be its sufficient condition. Taken seriously this finding is bound to

make people more hopeful about peaceful coexistence of different religious communities and further direct them to search for the real causes of such conflict in some different areas of human interest.

We would not like to give a straightforward answer to some of the questions raised here. Instead we would suggest in which direction answers should be sought. In the process we will notice that new areas of interaction between science and religion are opening up. We are to turn our attention to such question as if and what space has been left between them by, say, the dogmatic Christian theology and the complacent modern science: between the doctrine of suffering God and the ideology of thriving humanity. While reflecting on comparative religion the realist philosophy feels as much need to critically examine and understand the theme of Christian suffering and Hindu doctrine of karma as the ideology of thriving humanity which scientism associate with science. Among the points of contact and confrontation between science and religion are cosmology and genetics, two of the most recent and advanced areas of science. Lots of discussions and debates are taking place in these two fields³⁴ and we cannot afford to overlook the possibility of enriching *philosophy* of religion by incorporating them and taking part in the ongoing debates in these fields.



So far as the fact of plurality of religions is concerned one of the major objectives of realist philosophy is to do a sort of comparative religion. The present work is not intended to be an exercise in comparative religion in the standard sense or in a direct and straightforward way. We rather mean to reflect on, among other things,

the standard form of comparative religion – on the idea and practice of it. We reflect that comparative religion worth the name should not only begin by presupposing or admitting, as given fact, different religions or their existence, and end by noting their similarities and dissimilarities. First it should distinguish and relate different religions in some *religiously* significant ways. Further it should not confine itself to just drawing parallels but also make comparative *evolution* of different religions. At this stage some will say if this be our idea of comparative religion then its practice may not be easy or advisable. We will discuss this point little elaborately later. Those, who advise us to avoid comparative assessment of religions out of the fear that such practice would lead to deterioration or further deterioration of relationship between different religions or religious groups, believe in the fact of plurality of religions. If they, in addition, believe that there is such a fact as interfaith conflict then the plurality in question is at least its necessary condition. There are reasons to believe, we think, that the sort of comparative religion we recommend can contribute to the decrease of interfaith tension and not necessarily accentuate it.

What, according to those who would not accept it, will be the way of removing or minimizing the social menace of interfaith rivalry? We will discuss a few ways that have been suggested. It is held, for example, that one common feature of conflicting religions is that none of them is prepared to admit any religion as superior to it. Some modern day advocates of harmony of religions recommend that all religions should be *treated* at par. What is meant by the phrase “treated at par” is not clear. Does it mean that we should *believe* that all religions are at

par or what is meant is that all religions *are* in fact at par? What can be the objective ground for such admission or belief? Perhaps what is meant is that it is religiously and morally bad to pass judgment on any religion. But there are various ways of passing judgment; and there is little hope that the members of other religions will take us to be uttering literal truth if we say that we judge every religion equal. Does history, logic or fact allow us to believe that no religion can in principle be better than at least one other religion? Be that as it may, there are in fact people who arrange religions in a hierarchy. There may even be unanimity that a religion that keeps room for violence, like ritual killing of animals, is inferior to another religion which consciously omits or explicitly rejects such provision. There is little hope that there will be unanimity about which of these other religions be placed at which point of the scale of hierarchy? What is more important to examine is we think the tendency to believe or accept *a priori* that comparative assessment of religion is not possible, that there cannot be in principle a hierarchy of them. Comparative assessment is possible and is regularly made so far as language and food and painting and music and scientific theories and forms of government etc. (and practically about everything) are concerned. Why religion must be an exception?

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Another proposal is to admit only one religion as genuine religion and the rest perhaps as fake. There is still another view that all religions are both perfect and necessarily imperfect.³⁵ Will this satisfy the different warring groups? Philosophy finds, among many other

things, that it is necessary to distinguish the conflict between religious groups and communities from religious conflict between different groups of men. This is related to what we said above about philosophy directing our search for the causes of interfaith conflict to other areas of human interest. Incidentally, it should be noted that unless some accompanying philosophy can give it a sound conceptual foundation the talk of universal religion of the sort we find in the literature of liberal Hindus, may prove to be little more than soft spiritualism or pseudo mysticism. The idea of universal religion is nothing new and even in modern times different meanings have been given to the term. Unless the concerned people can generate concrete and viable policy and procedure of transforming the Indian or world society which will be appropriate for the purpose it will sound hollow to claim that Hinduism holds the key to the solution of modern global problems or claim that a certain form of Hinduism is the only true universal religion in the eyes of which all religions are the same; there is essential unity among all men irrespective of time, space, culture, language, race etc. Philosophers can examine critically and with the required detachment the views which are not very clear. Is universal religion any one of the existing religions of the world or is it a new religion which is different from and superior to the existing religions? Does it include the sectarian religions with their identity or replaces them? Is the unity of religions a sort of distributive unity or a transcendental unity? Many such things needs must be discussed and settled before one can rationally accept some modern doctrine of universal religion. Since the doctrine of universal

religion appears to deny or sort of play down plurality or diversity of religions it may be discussed in connection with religion as such. On the other hand since it is offered as a solution to interfaith conflict and involves reference to different religions it may as well be discussed with reference to religious diversity. This shows the division of our discussion into two broad sections of religious diversity and religious unity is more a matter of convenience.

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The reflections on comparative religion to be presented here will be from the perspective of a theistic realist (as distinct from say pragmatist theist of Rorty's description). Since it emanates from a realist perspective the account to be presented here will be different from that of the mystics or the pragmatists and the like; and since our position is that of a theist our account will be different both from that of atheism and non-theistic 'religion'. It may also be noted that one major reason which makes realists oppose pragmatism also makes them oppose both materialism and spiritualism. We need to clarify a bit our overall approach. What do we mean by a realist philosophy of religion? We will answer this question and offer, if not a definition of religion in general or of any particular religion, at least a sketch of an account, from a realist perspective, of how and why man came to have religion and what is meant by man's *coming* to have a religion.

Three groups of men who bring the three major challenges – followers of scientism, pragmatism and socialist ideology of a sort – largely agree on two points. First, there is essential difference of approach and content between science and religion and second, religious statements and judgments do not have cognitive or theoretical

content. A realist philosophy denies both the theses. It contends that religious beliefs and practices are often as rational as scientific beliefs and practices. Even if the standard of rationality, in this case, is not exactly what it is in current (European) science, it is quite rigorous. Besides, being cognitivist, the realists believe that religion has claim to objectivity and religious utterances have objective truth claim.

We need to note two other points. Though we use expressions like realism and realist often without qualification, these words are not unambiguous. There are many different types of realism also. We will generally follow the perspective of the Indian realist philosophers of the School called Nyāya.³⁶ Even the broader sense of philosophy, a sense in which we understand the expression all through our work, is essentially the Indian sense of it. I owe this insight to my teacher Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya.³⁷ This conception of philosophy is not only quite broad and substantive it involves essential reference to, besides culture, the culture specificity of philosophy and other disciplines of knowledge. Though it is controversial, we will not discuss the thesis of culture specificity here.³⁸ However, we accept this thesis.

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Religion is not regularly taught in Indian Universities. In Europe or more particularly in America there are institutions in which religion is studied with such advanced subjects as genetics³⁹. Besides a good many established scientists belonging to such fields as physics, biology and medicine find time to write and speak positively (and also negatively) about religion and with all seriousness⁴⁰. Some of these writings may be found in *Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science*. More importantly there are in recent times some notable advances in philosophical thinking about religion in different advanced areas of (Euro-American)

thinking about religion in different advanced areas of (Euro-American) philosophical thought. Two such areas are logic and philosophy of science. All through the history of philosophy great personalities like Socrates and Plato, Anselm and Descartes, Hume and Kant, Kierkegaard and Sartre and more recently Malcom and Plantinga have made important contributions to theology or thoughts and literature on God and religion. Quantified modal logic is an advance and debatable area of both formal and philosophical logic and possible world semantics is an equally great advance in the field of philosophical logic and semantics. It seems strange if any serious philosophy professional fails to take note of how using the apparatus of modal logic, logically acceptable formulation of the age old ontological proof of God has been given. If for nothing else at least for understanding and following such exciting developments of philosophy one would feel inclined to learn modal logic and its application in some areas of religion. Similarly we can hardly ignore the development, though somewhat less important or exciting, in philosophy of religion, which consists in explicitly dividing standard proofs for the existence of God into deductive and inductive arguments. While drawing this distinction Swinburne made an important claim that good scientific explanation can be found even outside science and what is called personal explanation in the field of philosophy of religion is a case in point. Thus even staying within mainstream academic philosophy one can seriously study religion and find it necessary even to reflect on some of the doctrines and findings of comparative religion. It may also be said that the East West dialogue in philosophy need not be confined exclusively to idealism as in the past or philosophy of language as is the case currently. Proofs of God is one among many more such subjects.

Part Two: Diversity of Religion

CHAPTER THREE

On the Idea of Comparative Religion

The idea of *comparative religion* is not very clear though this did not prevent some good scholars in the past to publish commendable works bearing the title comparative religion.⁴¹ Even if it looks or sounds so comparative religion is not the name of a religion as Hinduism or Christianity is. It is the description of a certain approach which one who studies religions (in the plural) may adopt. There are different ways in which one can study the phenomenon of religion. A person may like to study one particular religion not exclusively from within itself but (or but also) from the point of view of some other religion. Even a non-believer (or one assuming the position of such a person) may like to study the phenomenon of religion as such or one or more particular religion. Sometimes great importance is given to the study of religion from a neutral point of view, if such a point of view is there. Again one may decide to study different religions, not in isolation but in their interrelationship, standing outside every particular religion and from a standpoint of at least methodological neutrality. However, any study of different religions simultaneously is not necessarily doing comparative religion. One who studies a phenomenon like inference, knowledge, morals, space, time etc. as it is found studied in different cultures or philosophies, studies “parallel traditions” of thought on the subject.⁴² Such study brings to light important similarities and dissimilarities in the

content and style of discussion in different cultures. In a comparative study of certain phenomena, the study of them from a comparative standpoint, evaluation and comparative assessment are expected. This expectation is, however, rarely fulfilled when the subject of study is religion. In the context of comparative study of say languages it is not uncommon to find some great literary personality who explicitly passes judgment of evaluation. For example one such person says or reiterates the view that English language is deficient in its expressive power; it may be very good as a language of trade and commerce but not as a language of literature. However, in the extremely sensitive area of religion passing judgments of comparison is often considered as an act of indiscretion. Writers of comparative religion generally avoid relative assessment. Sometimes they even take care to mention explicitly that they do not want to compare. Even then comparative religion is viewed as that branch of study which affords richer and more sophisticated understanding of human beliefs and practices regarding the sacred, the numinous, the holy, the spiritual and the divine. It is a subject or discipline of knowledge which yields (or at least expected or believed to yield) better understanding of religion and religious matters. This is the least that one can and does naturally expect from a study which bears the name comparative study of religion. What is simultaneously the chief advantage and difficulty of comparative religion is that it studies every particular religion from an externalist point of view. One can expect greater objectivity in the description, explanation and understanding of a certain religion when it is studied not in isolation,

not from inside alone, but in its relation to one or more other religions or by an outsider either from a neutral position or from the point of view of a different religion. The enormous difficulty apart there is in such enterprise always the risk of losing authenticity in the process of ensuring objectivity. Greater use of indirect and secondary sources can hardly be avoided where comparative study of a number of religions is not carried out by a team comprising of knowledgeable and practising members of each one of the religions being studied. There sometimes result in such cases overgeneralization, distortion, over-interpretation, under interpretation and so on. Healthy, happy and effective combination of authenticity and objectivity is as much difficult as it is necessary. Without any comment we would ask one to read from the book *On The New Frontiers of Genetics and Religion* by J. Robert Nelson, the chapter entitled "Personal Religious Positions Individually Expressed". One will realize (what one already knows) that every Hindu is not the most authentic expositor of Hinduism. The same is true about every religion.

We can cite at random example of two foreigners who, though otherwise good and sympathetic scholars of Hinduism, developed, even after living in India for many years, completely different ideas and estimates about the nature and quality of ethical culture of the Hindus.⁴³ We have also record of how insightful had been the explanation of a foreigner why Indians are (or look) so callous, so to say, about human suffering.⁴⁴ Another point to note is that the scope of comparative religion and philosophy of religion tend to overlap in so far

as the study of comparative religion is viewed as a source of deeper understanding of the fundamental *philosophical* concerns of religion such as ethics, metaphysics and the nature and form of salvation.

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To return to the idea of comparative religion, it is not a distinct form of religion. It would be a case of category mistake if one thought that one was not told about all religions because one was told about all religions except comparative religion. One implication of the fact that there is such an approach to religion as comparative approach and there is such a discipline of knowledge as comparative religion is that there is plurality of religions. If there were not different religions with different doctrines, rituals, and scriptures etc. then there could not have been comparative study of religions. In recent time talks about universal religion and the unity of all religion are very popular. How this may be related to the extant literature on comparative religion is something into which we need to go very seriously.⁴⁵ Do researches in comparative religion show that all religions agree in essential points or that differences between existing religions are religiously unimportant and insignificant? If none of these is true then universal religion would be an altogether different religion – different from all existing religions.

A common man's view in the matter suggests that the expression comparative religion is short for the study of particular religion or religions in relation to other such religion or religions which notes the similarities and dissimilarities among the religions being studied. One use of such exercise is to further clarify the idea of religion

itself. The other use of it is that we can learn which feature or features are essential to religion; this knowledge in its turn can be useful in framing suitable criterion to distinguish religion from pseudo religion. If such a criterion has any actual application then whether or not we state it explicitly some existing religion can be judged superior or inferior, as the case may be, in comparison to some other religion. Anyway, when we study a religion or some aspect of it from the standpoint of how it compares with other religion (or religions) or its corresponding aspects, we do comparative religion in the minimum sense of the term. When we say such things alone we do not do comparative religion. We can be taken at best to reflect on the very idea of comparative religion or do philosophy of comparative religion. To be successful in its job the discipline of comparative religion should develop criterion or criteria for distinguishing different religions in some religiously important sense. In other words the distinctions should be consistent with certain generally agreed conception of religion which would be both significant and applicable to every particular religion.

A little more needs must be said about the nature of comparative approach to the study of religion as well as its advantages and disadvantages. A particular religion may be studied from within it by its members. When such a person studies another religion, however, he does so as an outsider – outsider to the second religion. On the view that there are different religions any person who is a member of one religion is in a position to study simultaneously one religion as an insider and at least one other religion as an outsider. However it is theoretically

possible for one to be an outsider to religion per se, to every religions. This will be a limiting case; for such a person there is no first or second religion; he is not an insider to any religion. Theoretically anyone can *become* such a radical outsider by choice. But it is difficult to be born as such a radical outsider or outsider to every particular religion. In principle it is possible for a person to hold certain beliefs and perform certain acts that no religion finds consistent with its conception of a religious person. The implication is that it is theoretically possible to have one single conception of religion or even one single religion. These are however matters which we cannot discuss.

What important difference does it make if one studies a religion as an insider than as an outsider? In order to qualify for the study of a religion as an insider a person must be a religious person in at least the minimum sense of being a member of a certain particular religion, a religion which he owns to be his. From this it does not logically follow that every other religion would be his second religion or a religion to which he admits himself to be an outsider. That conclusion can follow if one admits that there is at least one religion which is different from his own religion or that no one can be the member of more than one religion.⁴⁶ If there is one who believes that there is just one religion of which every religious man is a member then most likely that man will be either extremely liberal or extremely intolerant.⁴⁷ Those who we call mono-maniac are supposed to believe, whether they say it or not, that there is no religion other than the one of which they are members. If it is pointed out to them that there are as a matter of fact many different

religions, then they counter such remarks by reformulating their earlier position. They now say that there is only one *genuine* religion all other so-called religions are called religion by courtesy. We for the present ignore the view of the mono-maniacs. They will build or accept only such system or school of comparative religion which offer suitable criterion of religion or of genuine religion. Just as one's view of religion may be shaped by certain particular system of comparative religion so also the system of comparative religion one builds or accepts may be influenced by what religion one aligns with. There does not seem to be any easy solution to this problem. Equally difficult is the problem of clarifying how exactly the one religion of a mono-maniac is different from the universal religion of those who find in it the solution of interfaith conflict.

To the question what important difference does it make if one studies one's own religion rather than a religion which is not one's own, some say the study of a religion from within it has the chance of being more authentic. It is a great advantage which insiders have. Or it is better to say that this is an advantage which the outsiders do not have. The second and more cautious alternative formulation is felt necessary because one who is born within a religion does not automatically have authentic understanding of that religion. Generally speaking, however, an insider's account of his religion is more likely to be authentic compared to the account which an outsider can provide. Critics of a particular religion however may be quick to point out that this possible advantage is counterbalanced by the risk that an insider's account is

likely to be more subjective and biased. Further unless an account is objective it is not really authentic either. An acceptable account has to be both authentic and objective. If it is necessary for an outsider to be extremely careful to achieve authenticity then the insider has to be aware of his obligation to preserve objectivity in his account. To put it differently advantages and disadvantage of an insider are counterbalanced by the disadvantages and advantages of the outsider. The big problem is to ensure in a single account both objectivity and authenticity.

One method may be to always cross check one sort of account of a religion by the other sort of account of it. However, the corpus of literature of any particular (major) religion is so vast and often differences among the members of each of the two groups of insiders and outsiders are so mind boggling that cross checking becomes practically impossible. Is there no way out then? Can we not avoid, maximally at least, both the defects of being inauthentic and subjective in our account of religions? We do not agree with the suggestion that dependable account which combines both objectivity and authenticity, can come only from one who is an outsider to every religion being studied. On the contrary we think that such account can ensure only shallow objectivity of a freelance thinker. No substantive account or genuine understanding can come from freelance thinkers; it can come only from committed thinkers. Even when one disagrees with him one can learn more about Christian religion from Swinburne's account of it if

for no other reason, for his being a committed thinker of this religion. Similar committed thinkers are there in every religion.

Comparative religion, however, does not usually or necessarily mean just comparing the views of different people who can be grouped as outsiders and insiders in relation to a particular religion. It may and on occasion should mean the study of a particular religion by one and the same person. But the person needs must combine in him the virtues of both outsider and insider. In spite of being a member of the religion being studied he should be conscious of the possible advantages and disadvantages of such a position and should sincerely endeavour to transcend the limitations of an insider as well as that of an outsider – the limitations that tend to deprive his account of objectivity or authenticity. He must be able to achieve adequate detachment from his own religion and similar sympathy for every other religion. To the extent one succeeds in meeting these difficult requirements one becomes eligible for undertaking comparative study of religions. The accounts provided by such persons become dependable. However, even after all reasonable care and caution have been taken by a person, some people will continue to doubt the authenticity and/or objectivity of his account. Every single *positive* thing one says about one's own religion, in however detached a manner, is likely to be taken as biased by some persons. This is extremely frustrating for every sincere researcher who tries hard to achieve the sort of detachment and sympathy in question. The existence of skeptics cannot be wished away; they are always there demanding *absolute* objectivity and authenticity. So long we fail to

make such people ineffective the truths revealed by however detached a study will fail to have the desired effect either on the academicians or on the public at large.⁴⁸ If we remain firm on *optimal* objectivity we can take care of possible sense of frustration.

In fine no Archimedean point may be available in the comparative study of religion or religions; and the standpoint of comparative religion does not mean such a point. Any religion can still be studied optimally authentically and optimally objectively by an insider of or outsider to that particular religion. A Christian may study Christianity or Hinduism, say from a comparative standpoint.⁴⁹ We may seek to study mainly Hinduism from a comparative standpoint and try to combine as best as possible authenticity and objectivity in our account by remaining constantly and explicitly aware of the possible dangers and by resolute effort to overcome them. However there will still remain one difficulty about which we could hope to do very little at this stage. I mean the difficulty due to personal limitations. Very few are there who can claim to be in the ideal situation when they consider the amount of scholarship and detachment etc. an ideal scholar in the field of comparative religion needs must have.

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Some people think that apart from the theoretical gain in terms or resulting understanding, there could also be some practical and social benefit of studying religion from a comparative standpoint. First, those who consciously take up a comparative standpoint are in a position to do justice or better justice to the sincere but critical observations of an

outsider about their own religion. For a genuine and authentic study of a religion from a comparative standpoint would require that the person studying it (i) should have firsthand experience of some religion, as a member of it and (ii) should consciously decide to detach himself from his own religion for the purpose of the study in question and assume a neutral position as much as possible. Alternatively, one can consciously develop maximally critical attitude to one's own religion and maximally sympathetic attitude to the religion of others. Every theoretician of worth largely succeeds in achieving this dual role of a critical observer and a sympathetic inquirer. He succeeds in developing the ability to study one's own religion from the point of view of an outsider and religion of others from an insider's point of view. To doubt this possibility or deny it altogether is to indulge in lame and useless skepticism. Nobody may be able to completely detach himself from his own religion or develop absolute sympathy for other religions. But by achieving even limited success in this direction one can harvest important gain. That one cannot possibly do more is no reason why one should not do the little that one can. Nor can we judge a priori that the result of comparative study by such scholars is bound to be nil or negligible.

When we view our own religion from the point of view of who are our religious other (but who now need not be different from ourselves), we are likely to become explicitly aware of many features (good or bad) of it which we overlooked earlier. Even if we cannot immediately translate such awareness into action our knowledge of the

religion in question is likely to become more objective and deep. We can also take necessary steps to achieve warranted and possible reform if any⁵⁰. More often when we come to know what people of other religions (or we ourselves from a detached position) think and say about our religion, we tend to respond to these remarks, if these are negative, by exposing where the remarks went wrong, if they are wrong. If, however, the observations are found to be right and negative then we undertake to reinterpreting and reconstructing the aspects – doctrines or practices – of our religion in question and thereby contribute to the further development of our religion and our own understanding of it. We discover all of a sudden that we ourselves did not so long understand our religion properly or did not approach it in the best possible way. This to our mind is more important than responding to the view of others by showing that they misunderstood our religion. If it is rather natural for them to misunderstand at least to some extent and on some occasion, it is not, nor should it be, so natural for us to be influenced by their views.

One may insist that we should be able to show what is the use, if any, of such improved understanding or removal of misunderstanding of a religion. Some say this will lead to establishing harmony among religious groups and reducing or removing conflicts between them. We cannot be so sure that the only reason behind religious conflict is misunderstanding or lack of understanding. It may as well be refusal to admit as true what is supposedly a correct assessment of a certain religion (or some aspects of it) by some of its own members or by members of some other religions. The mere existence or claim or right to existence of a rival religion warrants, according to some, certain

'justified' actions even though these actions are alleged to be unjust violence from the side of the rival religion. The perpetrators of the so-called 'just' actions think that these actions are necessary for protecting a true religion (read their own religion) from fake ones (read other religions). Fake religions have no right to exist particularly because they pose a great threat to the preservation and promotion of genuine religion or the genuineness and purity of the true religion. This brings us to the question about the sense of *true* religion and finding generally acceptable and effective criterion which can enable us to distinguish optimally objectively a true religion from a pseudo one.

Generally speaking the ruling and most popular sentiment today among the educated people is that no sense can be given to the expression "true religion" or "fake religion". It is said that every religion is equal. The votaries of universal religion or harmony of religions preach this most forcefully. The popularity of this view is increasing every day even among the academicians and theoreticians. However, such a stand tends to deprive us of one of the central benefits of comparative study of religion. It is natural to expect that as a result of comparative study of religions we can gain proper and better understanding of particular religion or religions. And such understanding can manifest itself in judgments of comparative merits and demerits of the religion or religions being studied. Once it is revealed to one from such study that there are certain aspects of his religion which are bad or harmful (from which some other religions are free) one may be led to seriously think about the matter. This in its turn may reveal that the harmful aspect was no part of the religion in question but an example of aberration of the religion. Again we may discover that we ourselves

have many grave misunderstandings about the true nature and teaching of our own religion. This paves the way for the restoration of authentic religion from the popular distorted version of it.

There is another consideration also. There is hardly any a priori argument to show why comparative assessment or judgment may not be possible in the field of religion. If we find any such argument and it shows that in the world of religion everything goes then there will be no point in undertaking philosophical study to gain theoretical understanding of religion or religions. Theoreticians in general and philosophers of religion in particular need to make up their minds about how to respond to this social situation today when demand is made to accept and express the view that all religions are equal. Some of them ask the question "Which should we prefer or prioritize, being politically correct or being honest and rational?" Theoreticians have the right to freedom of inquiry and also freedom of speech. They cannot rule out a priori that it is illegitimate to ask such questions as "Which one religion, if any, is better than which other and why?" They believe in the theoretical possibility of some religion turning out to be better than another. In science or better philosophy of science we discuss all about genuine science and pseudo science. Why cannot there be or why can we not discuss about the distinction between genuine religion and pseudo religion? Why must all religions be genuine or pseudo? To ask this question is not to endorse the criterion 'my religion is the best and religion of those who do not accept my religion is not genuine'.

We can give a concrete example. Perhaps no religion or no person would deny that a religion is fake or comparatively inferior if it allows the practice of violence. This seems to be a universal and

absolute criterion of genuine religion. By applying this criterion some find Hinduism to be at the most an inferior religion. Hindus who do not think their religion to be inferior on this count explains or reinterprets the provision of violence that one finds in its scriptural texts.⁵¹ In this very act they admit the criterion of violence, when properly understood, to be a good criterion to judge which religion is genuine or superior. And once this is admitted one needs not be a Hindu to point out that religions that make provision for killing of men of other faiths cannot be a good religion.⁵² We admit it will not do to say just that this religion is good or this religion is bad but we admit that it should be possible to find out generally acceptable criterion of good religion and with reference to that certain provisions of certain religion may be objectively judged to be good or bad. Objection against Hinduism on account of its provision for religious killing of animals did not come from non-Indians or non-Hindus only. And such objection led to tremendous growth in our understanding of this provision and of Hinduism.⁵³ (Similar achievement is conspicuous by its absence in the Semitic religions in which there is provision for violence against non-believers). Hindu or non-Hindu critics of Hinduism who do not study the relevant literature extensively or carefully cannot be trusted for the objectivity or authenticity of their account of Hinduism. They do not allow their understanding of the Hinduism to grow. They (conveniently!) fail to achieve the required authenticity and objectivity in their account. Depending on their lack of information or possessing misinformation, they make short of their job as a critic of Hinduism or a seeker of understanding of Hinduism by simply giving voice to the objection and criticism and behave as if there is not or cannot be any answer to the

criticisms or explanation of the position being criticized. Some go farther and decide a priori that any account in defense must be subjective. They do not consider that their objection could equally be adjudged subjective and inauthentic. Another such criterion implicitly used is polytheism and idolatry.

To sum up so far, when different religions come into contact with one another there may result interfaith conflict and violence as well as growth and development of individual religion or religions. Similarly when a particular religion is sought to be understood in the light of remarks, criticisms and appreciations from within or outside – from members of one's own religion or of other religions – we are led to seeking or providing deeper explanation, sharper reformulation, and more penetrating reinterpretation of the concerned doctrines, beliefs and practices. Thus our understanding of religion or religions grows. Comparative religion so far is the theoretical counterpart of interfaith dialogue. Both are difficult but both are possible and useful.

CHAPTER FOUR

Some More Reflections on Comparative Religion

In this part of the book we are concerned with issues that make essential reference to the plurality of religion which, incidentally, seems to be a basic presupposition of the discipline of knowledge called Comparative Religion. This presupposition faces great challenges today as the talks of universal religion is so rife particularly in India. If belief in the plurality of religion is viewed with suspicion the continuation or relevance of disciplines like comparative religion becomes doubtful. Either the scholars and researchers of comparative religion refuse to entertain the truth or possibility of religion being one or they come out with explicit statement how the project of comparative religion relates itself to talks and beliefs about universal religion. Does comparative religion study systems of faith that are only approximation to religion proper? Is the one universal religion a fact or a project?⁵⁴ Do the modern advocates of the recent⁵⁵ doctrine of Universal Hinduism (or Hinduism proper or Vedānta as universal religion) propose to counter the efforts of followers of proselytizing, hegemonic, Semitic religions in their own ground by reducing the three dominating Semitic religions to just particularized versions or imperfect forms of one universal religion? Is the rhetoric of universal religion an intellectual response to the physical force with which the idea of Christianity (or Islam) as the highest form of religion⁵⁶ was sought to be established? We can also ask how the believers in universal religion view comparative religion. Do they think that plurality of religions is just a methodological presupposition of disciplines like comparative religion? Does the

plurality of religions or comparative religion have a place only at a certain imperfect stage of the development of man's religious and spiritual culture?

We do not suggest or accept, till more convincing arguments (as distinct from spirited propaganda) are made available, that the plurality of religion is just a methodological stance rather than a fact. However we do believe that an enterprise of comparative religion needs must note that some people, including some otherwise knowledgeable persons with good intention, seem to believe in something like a universal religion and they somehow sought to relate particular religions to it. Whether or not we accept their view the issue of the relation between universal religion and particular religions cannot be simply ignored. The issue seems to be more substantive than what appears when it is said that talks about diversity gets meaning only with reference to a unity. Is there anything more in the idea of a universal religion than what is there in the idea of unity of religions? This seems to be more a problem of philosophy of religion than comparative religion. In any case philosophical reflections on the idea and practice of comparative religion cannot avoid raising these issues.

The study of comparative religion discusses different religions not in isolation from one another but in their interrelationships. What constitutes two religions as different and independent religions? The sense in which Christianity and Hinduism are two different and independent religions cannot be the sense in which anyone of the two and the universal religion can be two religions. Should one say therefore that like one's saying "Hinduism, Islam and comparative religion", it will be a case of category mistake if someone says "Christianity, Buddhism

and universal religion?" If not, should we hold that every *particular* historical religion is an imperfect religion⁵⁷, or one among many localized *versions* of the one perfect religion? Though religion is one it can and does assume different forms. These particular forms are better called so many paths⁵⁸ or ways or forms in which religion is realized by men of different taste, temperament, ability and so on. Some tend to say all religions other than the few major and recognized religions are imperfect religion and approximation to one or the other genuine and perfect religion. We are not so sure. But we admit that it is not easy either to avoid or to solve the question why there are so many different religions.⁵⁹ Even so we cannot wish away the fact of plurality of religions by the rhetoric of universal religion or unity of religion and so on. There is also the question how one relates the idea of harmony of religions to the idea of universal religion and vice versa.

Though in some form or other these ideas or some of them at least, were there for long yet they were not among the major concerns of different religions or religious groups. They were at the best matters of personal belief of some practicing member of some particular religion. Only recently even some ordinary people in the countries like India are seized by this idea of a universal religion. It has become a vogue with them. Increasing number of people and leaders of people of India are trying to convince themselves and make others believe that in today's context the Indian doctrine of universal religion or the universal religion discovered first by India⁶⁰ can benefit the whole humanity. It has the power to transform the present fragmented world of suffering humanity into an ideal society marked by socio-spiritual progress and all round human happiness. We would be happiest persons if we could

believe in all this but unfortunately we find that such thoughts and talks lack required clarity and supporting evidence either rational or empirical. Nor do we think that there is anything in the Indian culture and thought which could suggest that diversity, even religious diversity, cannot exist without necessarily destroying peace.

A philosophical account of religion as such cannot and should not avoid the responsibility of providing some account, however brief and general, of the unity and diversity of religion. There are many religious and socio-political leaders who say that they deny diversity of religion except perhaps in the context of talks about unity in diversity of religion. We are yet to be convinced that they believe what they say or that they have found any cogent philosophical argument or explanation of the doctrine of universal religion.⁶¹ It is of no use to turn to the philosophy of *advaita Vedānta* for support though some people are seen to do that. In the process they modernize *Vedānta*.⁶² One needs to examine carefully how far this is warranted or correct. Viewed in the larger perspective such attempts and the motive behind them may send a wrong message to all – the message that (*advaita*) *Vedānta* is the only (perhaps with the exception of Buddhism) representative philosophy of India. Differentiating *Vedānta dharma* from *Vedānta* philosophy and restricting the claim of universality to the former would not improve the situation or make the message true. The popularity, being established through preaching of various sorts, of the view of *Vedānta* as universal religion and as India's most important message to the world tends to marginalize many other forms of rich Indian philosophy including analytical *Vedānta*. Besides the rhetoric of *Vedānta* as the human face

of Indian culture or Hinduism which is otherwise divisive, sectarian, superstitious and what not, has not succeeded in convincing all as either correct or innocuous whether in India or outside.⁶³

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Though there are many we would like to concentrate in this work on only two problems which an enterprise of comparative religion faces. One we have already discussed. An exercise of comparative religion presupposes enormous amount of knowledge of history, geography, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and the like. Unless it is a carefully planned and broad based team work, dependence on written records and secondary literature becomes unavoidable. Even after allowing for cross references and cross checking it is always safe to remain satisfied with presenting a broad outline to be filled in by further studies. (ii) The second difficulty is, in a sense, of more recent origin. Further, it is more practical and serious in nature. How can the researchers in this field reconcile the autonomy of thinking and freedom of inquiry on the one hand and the social responsibility on the other? Philosophers of religion and researchers in the field of comparative religion are social beings. Today not only one's own sense of prudence and practical sagacity but also, and more powerfully, the pressure of unwritten social norm and the expectation of contemporary society seem to demand that comparative religion should be practiced within certain limits or constraints. Restrictions are sort of imposed if not directly on the study, in a comparative mode, of religions at least on the expression of some of the possible results to which one may be led by such investigations. We are permitted at the most to drawing parallels or showing the absence of them, as the case may be, when comparing

different particular religions or different groups of religion. But we are not expected to make comparative assessment or in any case to express it. To make such assessment public would be, at least in some cases, an act of social irresponsibility. The stated, sometimes unstated but nonetheless well known to all, ground for the imposition of the restrictions in question is that religion is a very sensitive subject and community feelings have to be honored (feared!).

The concern of the philosophers is that as theoreticians (and unlike social or political activists) they can best discharge their social duty and responsibility by first turning their critical reflections as impartially as possible on various social issues and matters of social problems and secondly by making public both their line of thinking and the result of the same. It would be a social injustice to philosophers and theoreticians if they are not allowed to discharge this social duty. It is no use saying that nobody prevents them from discharging their social duties. But they themselves are expected to freely exercise restraint for the good of the society. When exercising restrain in one's thinking and expression is in the best interest of the society it would be an act of indiscretion not to do so for any responsible person. Besides as theoreticians philosophers can make definite and useful contribution in the field of comparative religion by clearly formulating and explicitly stating objective criteria of comparative evaluation. To apply them in practice, to actually and publicly judge and make comparative assessments of religions, is not the business of philosophers (even if this can be the task of the scholars of comparative religion). There may be some point in drawing such very fine line of demarcation⁶⁴ but the motivation behind doing so is still questionable. It is time academicians

seriously think over the matter rather than make the subject more and more sensitive every day by disallowing one of the best ways of solving religious conflict, namely, free and open discussion in a bid to reach thorough understanding of the required matters. What is at the root of the social problem, if there is really one, is not perhaps the sensitive character of the subject but the credibility of investigating scholars on the one hand and the so called judicious stand (or alarmist stance!) of the socio political activist leaders on the other. This needs to be deeply gone into more than ever before. If we do not want to be unjust to Hindu society and culture or the Hindus (Indians) in general, we should not fail to notice some of the redeeming features available here. One such feature is what is called these days the argumentative nature of the people.⁶⁵ In this connection we would like to recall and make reference to two or three incidents of recent past and then pass on to justify why comparative evaluation of different religions should be made more serious and effective an enterprise in comparative religion. The practice of this sort of comparative religion should be allowed if the discipline is not to lose a distinctive identity of its own or become a largely useless enterprise.

Of the three incidents in question two took place in Calcutta of which one took place in the University of Calcutta itself.⁶⁶ There were held two open debates one relating to the proof for the existence of God, the GNB-Ayub debate,⁶⁷ and the other regarding the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism, Satishchandra-Macdonald debate.⁶⁸ The third incident is that during the most strained relations among different religious communities Gandhi who in his own way believed in a sort of universal religion and was avowedly a Hindu,⁶⁹ wrote and

published his preference for a particular religion without apology or vengeance.⁷⁰ Indian mind is not as closed as some people want us to believe. It is our responsibility to keep alive the long tradition of open debate, free inquiry and expression. It should also be noted that the practice of playing safe has become ineffective. Everybody tries to play down religious plurality and speak about essential unity of all religions but almost no one believes or takes him seriously. People tend to take speakers of such words to be speaking with tongue in cheek in their bid to be politically correct.

We now turn to the more serious justification why we need to make comparative *assessment* and do that publicly. Those who advise us to abandon comparative assessment while doing comparative religion have not perhaps considered the following point. Not to undertake comparative assessment (or comparative reassessment) today will amount to allowing the existing assessments, made in the past, to continue unexamined and unchallenged. To take one example, one of the ideas and expressions which one meets so frequently in the literature of standard comparative religion is 'pagan', say. This is not a merely descriptive term, it is an evaluative expression. The evaluation in question is not beyond doubt or objection. Can we do comparative religion today without subjecting such evaluations to further examinations particularly in the light of new facts and new knowledge gained in the mean time or advances made in the field of methodology? There are many other examples to show that comparative evaluations were made in the past and they proved considerably influential. We have reason to believe that such evaluations are often wrong and need revision. If we disallow, on the plea that the subject is sensitive,

reconsideration of earlier views or fresh comparative assessment, then not only we would prevent the growth of comparative religion but also allow old mistakes to continue as truth by default (may be to the advantage of a certain particular religion or group of religions only) . To take just one quick example at random, it will be inexcusable to continue with the old idea that Buddhism originated in India and then *vanished* from there and flourished in foreign lands; or that that Buddhism disappeared from India due to large scale persecution of the Buddhists by the Hindus. We need to take into account the findings of critical (re-) thinking and study by some great modern men which decisively show that Buddhism never disappeared from India⁷¹ and never was there any large scale persecution of Buddhists in India. Another mistaken idea of rather recent origin, that Buddhism is an independent religious tradition parallel to Hinduism⁷² needs to be thoroughly exposed or examined by serious philosophers. Such efforts will breathe new life to academic philosophy including philosophy of religion which is fast becoming sterile every day. To give one more example, we would like to thoroughly argue against the general belief that monotheism is the greatest achievement of the Semites; it is their original contribution to the world religious thought. All these show that today evaluative comparative religion is both necessary and useful.

In the context of diversity of religion we note that the standard typology of religion in the mainstream comparative religion is somewhat narrow and biased. Philosophy, at least the philosophy we represent, demands that the religions should be objectively classified in accordance with some rational and relevant principle or principles such that the different religions are seen as different in some *religiously important*

and relevant sense. We doubt if the broad division of religions into Abrahamic and Indian or Semitic and pagan is of that type. Compared to many early religions the three Abrahamic religions are very young. To view ancient religions as different from or in contrast with religions that emerged much later, which did not exist in old days, and make some evaluation on that basis, do not seem to be even methodologically very sound or objective. We need to discuss some developments of religious thought in pre-Christian Greece and Rome which are highly interesting in themselves. We would also suggest that some other available principles of division may be more objective and also important or interesting. According to one such principle religions are divided into sacramental, prophetic and mystical. Another division is division into founded and nameless religion.⁷³ Still another principle of division divides religions into natural and revealed⁷⁴ with an implied evaluation that makes the latter group of religions more authentic and authoritative. There may be many more such principles of division and discovery of some more acceptable principle cannot be ruled out. Another challenging task will be to find principle of division which would apply not only to major religions like Christianity and Hinduism but also to next level divisions within each one of them. Independent of whether we succeed in this task or when, we need to make clear, as much as possible, the divisions like the one between the theistic religion and non-theistic religion⁷⁵ or between religious morality and secular morality (or spirituality) etc. Any adequate definition or characterization of religion must keep these divisions in view and define religion and morality accordingly. Kant's failure in this respect is not normally

noticed by working philosophers though Kant himself, as we will show, was not unaware of it.

We need much more philosophical discussion, in addition to, though not without reference to, discussion already available from the perspective of such disciplines as anthropology, sociology, history and comparative religion, on the question of unity and diversity of Semitic religions and the continuity and discontinuity among them with special reference to their scriptures, the Tanakh or the first part of it, the Pentateuch, the New Testament, and the Koran. The second important feature to be noted is that the unity as well as common excellence, compared to religion like Hinduism, of these three forms of religion is believed to consist in, among other things, their doctrine of monotheism and the absence of the doctrine of idolatry. However one of the longest religious conflict – eight fights between the Crescent and the Cross – spread over two centuries – clearly indicates that the Church and the Holy places are viewed as especially marked by the presence of God; these are in fact treated or viewed as the embodiment of Christ. Other two Semitic religions have similarities in this respect. The common attitude of the Hindus even to such minimal form of ‘idolatry’ is worth noticing though it is done rarely. In a moving prayer Vyāsadeva, one of the greatest figures in the so called idolatrous Hinduism, sought God’s forgiveness for having committed (to a minimum extent) the sort of mistake the practitioners of idolatry are accused of doing . He sought forgiveness of God even for associating Him with certain places of

pilgrimage when he spoke of such places and for even singing in His praise.⁷⁶ It is a pity we could not accommodate in the work a comparative discussion of Hindu theism and Semitic theism. Anyway, the love-hate relationship between Judaism and Christianity and between these two on the one hand and Islam on the other seems to exemplify certain principles and pattern of thinking that needs to be investigated. It is also a matter of wonder why we do not treat the continuity and discontinuity of scripture in Semitic religions in the same way in which we do it in case of Indian religions and vice versa. In Comparative religion or in evaluative comparative religion we should also distinguish, compare and make comparative assessment of different attitudes to religion and division of religions which bears reference to such attitudes. For example there are three major attitudes which man has to religion, intellectualist, emotional and what is variously called ritualistic or magical. Hindus think that all these attitudes may be displayed in the life of a single man at the different stages of his religious development. Many liberal Hindus are staunch supporters of this view who take intellectual approach to be best suited for more advanced people. It is not very clear always if intellectually more developed people must also be religiously more developed. The position of classical Hinduism is not very clear either. First the distinction of the three paths in question is a later phenomenon in India. It was perhaps not there in any strong form before fifteenth century. Since then a large number of persons came to believe and say that the

intellectual path or approach (*jñānamārga*) is entirely independent and equally effective as the emotional approach (*bhaktimārga*). Nobody however ever believed that the path or approach of action (*karmamārga*) was completely independent of each one of the two other approaches. This point is often missed or ignored when the Hindus (of certain period of history) are accused of ritualism? What exactly is objectionable in ritualism? Is it said or can it be said that the observance of 'rituals' play no part in making man eligible to receive religious knowledge or instructions? What is usually said is that they are superstitious. How a negative answer to the question just put can be reconciled with the latter statement? These are matters which need to be more thoroughly discussed. Rarely the liberal Hindus or their counterparts among non-Hindu votaries of scientism discuss them in any depth.

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Though admittedly coming from the same source, ultimately speaking, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are treated almost as completely independent of one another so much so the relationship among them is treated as interfaith relationship. When we turn to Asia or the Indian sub-continent and mainly discuss Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, we similarly think that these are all independent religions; however many think otherwise.⁷⁷ From the perspective of standard comparative religion examples of intra-faith division are the division between the *Sākta* and the *Vaiṣṇava* sects or between the *Shiā* and the *Sunni* sects. Often less attention is given to the study of intra-faith

relationship; the study of interfaith relationship gets much greater attention. Historical studies often seem to do greater justice to intra-faith relationship. Historians note that in certain periods of time these faiths emerged as revolutionary forces against the ruling religion of the time in the respective societies. What the historians describe as the Bhakti *movement* in India is an example.⁷⁸ Even when the two major faiths are engaged in interfaith conflict and even when sub-faiths under each of them are engaged in intra-faith conflicts, two sub faiths belonging to two different and conflicting major faiths are found to be in some sort of mutual harmony.⁷⁹ Thus when two major faiths Hinduism and Islam are strongly opposed to each other some Bhakti cults or sects within Hinduism is in very peaceful and friendly relationship with Sufism which basically belongs to Islamic religious tradition and continued to receive patronage from Muslim rulers and plunderers.⁸⁰ Phenomena such as these also deserve to be given more attention. In every major religion there arose perhaps a liberal group. Like liberal Christianity there is such a thing as liberal Islam and liberal Hinduism. We need to closely study how the liberal traditions are treated by the mother religion or religious culture within which they emerged sometimes as a protest. We need also to discuss both philosophically and socio-historically the problem and prospect of unity, solidarity or whatever among all these liberal traditions.

Religious reform is another important topic which deserved to be studied both in comparative religion and philosophy of religion. One of the four revolutionary movements that mark the emergence of modern India is religious reform movement.⁸¹ During these movements one section of revolutionaries, the more intellectual and academic

section, turned to the religious scripture and scriptural literature for support of their views. Where the texts did not appear to support their views they adopted the means of forced interpretation and often wrong translation.⁸² Even apart from the project of reviving and further continuing the realist philosophers' attempt to rereading the scriptures and interpret them along dualist line, we strongly feel the need to study the Hindu scripture or scriptural literature for the intellectual and philosophical thought-content of it. It may turn out to be both daunting and extremely rewarding task for studies like theory of interpretation, philosophy, philosophy of religion and comparative religion.

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There are many dimensions of scriptures to the study to which philosophically oriented scholars of comparative religion can do better justice. For one reason there are involved here some very central epistemological issues. It is generally believed and the belief is generally true that scripture is a core component of religion or religious system. Almost every major religion has a scripture and scriptures of different religions are different. The idea of a scripture, its relation to the religion to which it belongs, and the attitude to it of the members of the concerned religious community are also important subjects for the comparative religion to study. On closer examination it will turn out that the popular views about these matters are neither very clear nor supported by good evidence. Our understanding of and judgment on the continuity of the Semitic religions on the one hand and discontinuity between Hinduism and Buddhism (or, if it suits people, the Vaidika religion, Buddhism and Hinduism, in this order) are cases in point.

Discerning as they are philosophers of religion can hardly fail to note that there are at the most insufficient evidences at the disposal of those who project, perhaps mistakenly or for some ulterior motive or hidden agenda, that Buddhism is a separate religion at par with Hinduism or that Vedānta is a distinct *dharma* or religion not within Hinduism but within Vedism. In this connection we need to study and assess carefully the way effort is being made to change people's perceptions about the Veda, the Vaidika culture and the Hindu religion.⁸³ Similarly neither in philosophy nor in comparative religion sufficient importance seems to have been given to the question if and what arguments were exchanged between the believers in Christianity and those who opposed it and were ruthlessly subdued towards the end of the Roman Empire. In India we know far less about the arguments of those who opposed the stalwarts of Bengal and India who stood for reform of the Hindu religion. Even the modernized version or interpretation of Hinduism by men like Radhakrishnan is more read and quoted than examined or discussed. In sum, to do justice to these aspects of religion or its study one cannot help involving philosophers, theologians, men of comparative religion, history and so on. This will help us in achieving the overall requirement of maximization of objectivity along with authenticity in our views about religions.

One last point may be added by way of reflections on the standard form of comparative religion where we miss much emphasis on such points of comparison between religions as the code of values or duties. For example compared to the system of Hindu religion Islam is very poor in this respect.⁸⁴ Even this remark needs to be elaborated and

examined in an unbiased way. Again comparative account of the conception of God in the texts of standard comparative religion usually omits almost completely the rational sophistications which philosophically oriented great religious personalities of the past introduced in their discussion of religious matters. Such omissions are often made on the basis of the mistaken view that all such sophistications were no more than barren medieval scholarship. The study of such sophistications of great philosophical value in the writings of persons like Thomas, Aquinas, Śaṅkarācārya or Udaynācārya's is crucially important if we are to adequately respond to the challenges to religion from say scientism. It is not enough to note the differences between creationism and evolutionism, we need to note the significant differences between different theories of creation which some of the major religions and theologies offer.⁸⁵ Comparisons, without referring to these differences among religions, all of which agree in admitting a creator God, are bound to remain superficial. Standard comparative religion needs to transform itself and become more mature if they are to be of real help in producing deep and useful understanding of the phenomenon of religion in respect of its diversity.

The standard texts of philosophy of religion are, on the other hand, quite deficient in that they do not discuss many important details of religion which are noticed in standard comparative religion. The plea is perhaps that philosophy is a general study which minds general principles rather than particular truths. But acceptance, formulations and defense of general principles in ignorance – ignorance of the concrete and particular facts – tend to become barren speculation. General principles are useful as a means of theoretical (philosophical)

explanations of these facts. When philosophers sort of attend to particular religious facts and features they are seen to devote more pages for stating sociological and anthropological account instead of themselves attempting more sophisticated and penetrating accounts. In their more philosophical parts the discussions of the standard texts of philosophy of religion remain confined to just proofs of God or analysis of religious language. Even if they discuss with reference to Hinduism the doctrine of Karma and rebirth the texts rarely *discuss* the Christian doctrines of divine suffering or original sin. Texts of comparative religion also rarely present comprehensive rational explanation or interpretation of these doctrines. Similarly the central doctrines of all Indian religions like the doctrine that men are born unequal, that human birth (or even death) is not just a biological phenomenon and that generalized doctrine of evolution does not hold are rarely discussed. The doctrine of divine suffering is likely to strike the Hindus as very difficult to understand, more difficult than the doctrine of trinity. It will be a very rewarding task for practitioners of comparative religion to study the attitude of different religious groups to the phenomenon of human suffering. The way Christianity views human suffering, its origin and remedy, is distinctly different from the way Hinduism views them. So the understanding of and approach to the theme of human happiness will naturally be different in these two religions. It is worth noting that the subjects of human happiness and suffering are among the central topics of general Indian philosophy. The case is entirely different when we turn to modern European philosophy. We may rather incidentally mention another point. In a modern scientific society like (modern) Europe the problem of reconciling, both in thought and practice, science

with religion is particularly pressing.⁸⁶ Some philosophers of religion show, in their writings, acute awareness of this. Even when not directly addressed this awareness seem to determine even define the approach of European philosophy of religion. Till date the ruling paradigms of philosophy of religion and comparative religion are modern European subjects which bear these names. We wonder whether time has come to revise the current conceptions of these subjects as these are informed almost exclusively by states of affair in Europe. Such need is being increasingly felt so far as current conception of science is concerned.

Apart from other things, more analytic accounts than is usually available, of the following four themes seem to be absolutely necessary in any moderately comprehensive study of religion from the standpoint of comparative religion.(i) How some Hindus compare Islam and Christianity with Hinduism, (ii) how the Jews and the Christians view differently the relation between these two Semitic religions, (iii) how Muslims view their relationship to the other two Semitic religions on the basis of the Koran and (iv) how the personalities of the founders of four major founded religions compare with one another. This is in addition to the broader, comprehensive and analytical account of religion as such and criteria of distinguishing different religions in some religiously significant way. Lastly, for the present occasion, in addition to the discussion of natural evil and religious violence from the standpoint of different religions it is necessary to study the phenomenon of religious conversion, interfaith conflict and violence which are matters of supreme concern of almost all communities and countries today.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Semitic and Pre-Semitic Religion

One of the divisions of the religions of the world with which the account of Comparative religion usually begins is the division into Semitic and non-Semitic religions. The reflections we present here on this division and on certain related issues are largely or almost exclusively based on extant literature which is vast and varied and often conflicting. It is therefore quite unlikely that these reflections will not be challenged. One should not suppose that we make any claim to absolute accuracy or finality of the reflections we present here; but we certainly believe that these reflections deserve careful consideration. We cannot help relying on extant literature for we cannot fall back on relevant personal experience; first because we do not have it and second we do not have any clear idea as to the personal experience of which fact or phenomenon would be relevant or decisive. Lastly even if we had the sort of experience in question the critics would not perhaps find that more convincing.

We think, as do many others, that what is called "intensity of faith"⁸⁷ is one of the chief characteristics of the Semites. We consider it to be religiously important for quite different reasons. This characteristic is often believed to turn its possessors into more deeply religious persons than the individuals of many other religious sects. But historical evidences often incline one to link it to religious fundamentalism and aggressiveness. The religious aggression committed by the Christians and Mohammedans have no parallel

among the pagan Greeks or Romans, let alone the Indians. Yet it has been remarked “Aryas of India – to cite one example – have surpassed the Semites in intensity of faith...”⁸⁸ We suspect that intensity of faith displayed by religious fundamentalists is not always distinguished from, rather confused with, totally absorbing and overwhelmingly rich experience of the mystics. Religious fundamentalists, aggressors and plunderers, are strongly extrovert and involved whereas the genuine mystics are withdrawn and almost exclusively focused on inner experience. It would be in order if we mention that some find the Jews more tolerant than the members of the other two Semitic groups.⁸⁹ They believe that this is partly at least due to the fact that though individually some Jews have excelled in the fields of education, science, philosophy etc. as a race they could not muster the administrative, organizational (political) and military expertise (and, we would add, aspirations). Some have noticed similarity between Semitic or Islamic exclusiveness with that of the Indians or Indian Aryans. What has not been noticed is the fundamental difference in character between Semitic exclusiveness and Indian exclusiveness. It is indeed a fundamental trait of Indian religious culture that its members consciously practise exclusiveness. But they have always combined their practice of exclusiveness with tolerance or accommodation.⁹⁰ It could be possible because Indians have always believed that plurality is not only a matter of common belief but a fact or reality.⁹¹ Within the Semitic groups, however, the Mohammedans and Christians are not only *strongly*⁹² monotheistic in religion but monolithic in their view about culture. The spirit of exclusiveness of a fundamentalist and that of a

hegemonic monolithic culture result in aggression and proselytizing zeal. A monolithic culture *implements exclusiveness by absorbing*, devouring,⁹³ conquering, and converting the other people largely by aggression. Such groups originally had military power or under pressure of circumstances developed it. The Arabs in general and the founder of Islam religion in particular are cases in point. Monolithic culture soon turns into what has been called “monomaniac” culture.⁹⁴ Such a culture has never learned to understand or deal properly with pluralism. It sees in another culture always a threat to its sovereignty or supremacy, even perhaps to its identity and existence. This (largely assumed) threat it seeks to combat by force, fraud or any such means. In the field of (theistic) religion, the (one) God of a monolithic culture is often found to say “I am an intolerant God”. The Āryan exclusiveness is always exclusiveness with accommodation. This is just not the case, it seems, with the Semitic people, not at least with the Mohammedans and Christians. One redeeming features with the [European] Christians however is that since the time of Enlightenment there has been the rise of the spirit of free self criticism linked with the great value placed on rational inquiry and autonomy of reason. This tended to somewhat balance and minimize their aggressiveness. The birth of liberal Christianity does not seem to have its parallel in Islam. Today Christians find it easier to submit (even if sometimes unofficially) to or accept the social norms of a secular state. Periodical revisions (including recent ones) of earlier Christian dogmas by the Vatican seem to testify to the truth of this. What has contributed further to this development is the separation of the State and the Church which did not happen originally

very peacefully. If (mainly) the Christians did not have the requisite military prowess or a strong desire to display it then the religious cause, however valid it might have been otherwise, hardly have led to eight military expeditions or crusades resulting in so much loss of life and property. On top of all this the major issue that led to the crusades remained unresolved. The aggressive nature of a monolithic culture again expresses itself, with no less violence, in the form of political expeditions for territorial expansion and colonization. Now the days of colonization are also over. The spread of general education, development of science, growth of political philosophy and the resulting all round social and cultural improvement have contributed largely to the growth of greater liberalism and tolerance in European Christian countries. But this did not happen till the world was made to witness two great, rather bitter, world wars. Some think, with justification we believe, that the basic traits of the hegemonic monolithic culture of aggressiveness and expansionism have only changed form and means and location of expression and not much besides. It has now taken the form of say economic dominance. Though some great economists and cultural theorists⁹⁵ may argue otherwise and try to show that globalization should be viewed in its broader perspective of cultural globalization yet the majority seem to be convinced that basically globalization is in spirit and intention an effort to secure economic supremacy on the part of European countries. Failure of socialism of some form and in some places has strengthened the process. However, in the present context socialism particularly communism is a greater challenge to religion than capitalism or such phenomenon as Protestant

ethics that developed within generally capitalist atmosphere. From the point of view of religion, and otherwise also, communism displayed dangerous aggressiveness. Some say communism proved itself to be a greater danger to religion by becoming itself an aggressive and narrow 'religion'.

To come back to the aggressiveness of the Semite, it has been partly traced to the characteristic "ferocity" of some of the Semite groups. This characteristic is probably related to the unfavourable living condition in the sterile desert land of Arabia, the "Semitic cradle-land". In their bid to absolve the Semite of all sorts of atrocities done to other people, historical evidence of which abounds, some seemingly biased scholars have written "It is doubtful, however, whether Semites have ever been more ferocious than other peoples who were at the same stage of civilization as the Semites when they committed the atrocities that impress the modern man. Ferocity is characteristic of all ancient man."⁹⁶ What a bold (over) generalization!

We are of the opinion that their common place of origin or common cradle land of the Semites should not make us oblivious of some important differences among the three Abrahamic religions. In the opinion of some people the Semites have gifted the world the best religious literature and best religious systems.⁹⁷ Three of these systems are Judaism (from 2000-1800 B. C. E., the time of Abraham), Christianity (first Century in Palestine) and Mohammedanism (seventh century). It is normally believed that the Semites had a racial preference for monotheism. This however has been found to be historically false. Nonetheless Abraham was the worshipper of one God. It is equally true

that all the primitive Semitic tribes did not have the same God or one God. Each tribe had its own god and there were often clashes of interest between tribes. Partly through such clashes larger states were formed. Some therefore hold that not monotheism but henotheism was the racial preference of the Semites.

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The Semite race produced some great individuals who were religiously highly evolved and with great vision. These great religious personalities in the field of religion are compared with the great figures produced by Greece in the field of literature. This is another example to my mind of left handed compliment. Europeans did the same to India when they said that India was great because she had a great religious and mystical culture. They intended thereby to safeguard their exclusive claim to the title of scientific and rational culture.⁹⁸ These people seem to say that Greece produced great men of literature for which they may be rightly proud but the Semites reserve the right to supremacy, compared to (at least) Greece, in the field of religion. Much more work in the field of ancient Greek and Roman religions seems to be necessary in the disciplines comparative religion. More important it is for all or all concerned, to be explicitly aware of the fact that the history or the religious history of the world did not begin with the Semites. Our knowledge of the state of religion in the pre-Semitic world is not only limited but confined among the concerned scholars only. Great many educated public appear to be quite innocent in this matter. Further, the larger portion of the meager amount of available knowledge and information of the pre-Semitic religious traditions we have are produced

or obtained by the researchers of comparative religion many of whom are members of the Semitic religion.

Semitic religions found, in addition to their founders, some great religious leaders in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Paul etc. In founded religions – and scholars have grouped Judaism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and Buddhism in this category – and in proselytizing religions the life and character of the founders and leaders, of great preachers and missionaries, become very important. They are remembered and revered sometimes as saints. Moses among the Jews and Paul among the Christians are cases in point. Incidentally, it may be found out, on close examination, that Buddhism is not a founded religion in the same sense of the term as other founded religions which are also revealed religions.

Our present interest is to study first the characteristics of religions, particularly the religions of Greece and Rome in the pre-Christian (even pre-Judaic) era, and later the relationships among the three Semitic religions. But to complete the story of the Semites, we need to remember that many scholars maintain that only the Semites have produced monotheism. Some among them again maintain that though there was not much in the racial character of the Semites to make them produce or adopt monotheism it goes to the credit of some great individuals of the Semite origin who had the nobility of character to command respect and also enough ability otherwise, to infuse in the public exalted religious vision. They actually introduced monotheism which still enjoys universal appeal. It is remembered that monotheism was first taught by Jesus and Paul and then “in a less exalted form by

Muhammad.” Barton makes no reference to Moses in this connection but at least Abraham is known to be a monotheist in practice at least.

One reason why we want to include in this work some discussion of early Greek and later Hellenic religion is that “the indebtedness of Christian dogma and ritual to the later Hellenic paganism was far greater than [is] supposed”.⁹⁹ The story of the Greek religion begins not later than the eighth century B.C. But there are great difficulties in piecing together diverse evidences and indications to build up one grand story that can be given the name (early) Greek religion. Many evidences that can be seen as indications of the growth of religious beliefs and practices cannot always be traced to their historical roots. Greece was not primarily a geographical or national unity, nor was it a religious unity. It was mainly a cultural unity. The word Greece primarily suggests to most people the picture of a (highly) developed philosophical (and ‘political’) culture. By the normal criterion, which we also largely endorse, there is not or cannot be such a thing as Greek religion, let alone the Greek religion. For the Greeks have no scripture. They indeed had practices that can safely be called religious and if these practices are any indication then they were definitely polytheistic throughout. We will come to this later. Though the Greeks had no scripture (till at least the time it was Christianized), they had, apart from religious practices and religious places and festivities, what may be called a sort of philosophy of religion. We are permitted to call it so as there were discussions of matters like God, creator of the world and so on by established philosophers and others. (We will speak of this a little more presently.) Otherwise the Greek thinking was more of the nature of free thinking

and inquiry which could be better described as speculative philosophy. It was neither inspired nor hindered by scripture or scriptural doctrines. Though mythologies were there “they were [the] less able to choke the growth of higher ethical-religious spirit in that they were not enshrined in sacred books [scriptures] that could speak with authority to the people”.¹⁰⁰

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By their faith and practice the Greeks were, as said before, largely or more generally polytheistic. But there were a number of philosophers who were against polytheism though they never developed a system that could be called monotheism with a personal God. God was more of the nature of some functional force rather than a person. Gradual shift from the conception of a cosmic force creating and controlling external the nature to a personal God invested with moral qualities of justice, kindness etc. on the one hand and concern for man who He was guiding to a higher ethical and spiritual life, is a sure progress in the field of religion. Philosophical thinking in Greece succeeded in achieving this before the emergence of Christianity or even Judaism. There was still no indication there, as we find it in India, of a happy reconciliation between polytheism at one level and monotheism at another level, both in the life of an Individual and the race as a whole. However, we note an important feature in the theory and practice of great thinkers. A highly intellectual and rational temperament was combined with strong ethical and religious convictions.¹⁰¹ Socrates is perhaps the best example.

As early as in the writings of Homer we find that polytheism had attained a higher form. Already there was an idea of gods forming a

family under one supreme head. From their anthropomorphic approach the Greeks conceived their gods as individual *theoi* with concrete personality and divinity. They were moral beings with human passions and ethical and artistic emotions. (Old deities of Rome however were “vague and dimly outlined forces, animate yet scarcely personal”). More important still is that the rituals of Homeric polytheism had already attained a higher plane. Sacrifice was no longer viewed as bribe but as a sort of family communion and dinner. Iran too had developed personal deities like Mitra and Varuṇa before 400 B.C. (it was arguably derived from earlier Āryans) and influence of this on the Hellenistic culture is not merely a theoretical possibility or wild guess; it is most likely true.

Till much later a date the Semitic people did not succeed in developing political thoughts and institutions. In Greece however, the idea and institution of temple and temple deity as vested with political wisdom and guiding political course of action through counsel and prophesies became gradually more visible allowing scholars to find what they call “political’ religion” there. But the presence or development of ethical religion also cannot be overlooked. Soon there developed the conception of gods which was no longer implanted in the mind of the people by fear or by the expectation of worldly benefit like protection against adverse nature or human (racial) enemies. These gods were friendly, wise and good guide. A milder sentiment was developed and the gods came to be regarded no longer as just righteous and avenging the wrong but also as loving, merciful, compassionate and helping the weak and the needy. Another point of importance is that even after the establishment of political institutions, temples and priesthood Greece escaped sacerdotalism and what is called the state church conflict which

fills the pages of Christian history. In early Greece sacrifice, with or without animal, and feasting was to strengthen the natural bond like family bond with some religious significance. The rituals were more sober than cruel. Along with the worship of the dead ancestors sometimes hero worship was also practised. The notion and practice of the rituals of purification were also there. Literary or archeological evidences of idolatry are not numerous though some evidences are there. What is most important from the point of view of the Hindu religion is the modern interpretation of the practice of idolatry. Let me quote "The worship before the idol intensified the already powerful anthropomorphic instinct of the polytheism, and was at once a source of strength and a cause of narrowness. It brought to the people a strong conviction of the real presence of the concrete individual divinity; as it gave its mandate to the greatest art of the world, it evolved the ideal of divinity as the ideal of humanity, expressible in forms of beauty, strength, and majesty; On the other hand, it was a force working against the development of a more mystic, more immaterial religion, or of a consciousness of godhead as an all-pervading spirit, such as might arise out of the *daimones* or *numina* which never wholly faded from the popular creed."¹⁰²

Incidentally we cannot overlook, when we study Greek thought in its development, the interest of Greek *philosophers* in religious matter. This exposes one bias of the majority of modern Euro-American thinkers and their pupils all over the world. Even when it is not expressed in words by them the way they behave clearly shows that they believe that religion does not find a happy habitation in a rational culture and that the subject of religion does not belong to the

mainstream philosophy. Though different from science, modern and more so contemporary European philosophy is an intellectual, theoretical and rational enterprise.

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Right now we are concerned with Greek Philosophers only. From the 6th century B. C. we have some dependable evidences which however show that the relation between philosophy and religion was quite complex. Cosmology, polytheism, and extra human source of socio-political and ethical guidance are major points of interest. Since there was no scripture man had to depend in each of these matters, on deities or their oracles. This shows the prevailing system was polytheistic. One of the major subjects of interest of the sixth century Greek philosophers like Pythagoras, Empedocles, Xenophanes, and Heraclitus was (philosophy of) language. Their intellectual and philosophical temperament did not allow them to admit any authority to the 'mythical' story of the creation of the world. But they were generally interested in the nature and the true definition of godhead (in the singular). They may be found opposed to the spirit of polytheism and anthropomorphism. God was not a person but a force. Pythagoras' approach was mathematical and he threw up a sort of challenge to the idea of polytheistic gods. What is most important about Pythagoras is that he exemplified a truth that, contrary to popular belief, highly rationalistic minds tend to turn to mysticism or become mystical if not mystic. This is a mystery but we need to endeavour to understand it since it is an important fact or phenomenon of religious life and culture. Philosophical discussion of the subject should be deemed most appropriate. Scientific rationality hardly has any place for mysticism; but

modern scientific rationality is perhaps not the only form that rationality can or need have. In any case, Pythagoras was "most powerful champion and apostle of Orphism, the founder of those secret societies which threatened the secular and intellectual freedom of Hellas." The true implication, it seems, is that Pythagoras emphasized more the mystical and personal, as opposed to the public, side of religion. Xenophanes made himself famous by his strong protest and polemics against the anthropomorphism of Greek polytheism. Many passages of his writings incline us to believe that he was a monotheist with a difference; the general tenure of his thought was in favour of viewing god as a cosmic principle or force rather than a person. The overall message of the fragments of Heraclitus is that he was also no admirer of polytheism or idolatry. In spite of all this we cannot say that effective separation between religion and science (scientific cosmogony) was reached as yet. But monotheistic ideas and trends cannot be missed in early Greek thinking. The Semites or Judaism, Christianity and Islam are not the inventors of monotheism and not surely of God as a certain non-theistic divine principle (or God). The latter view of God is quite popular among some scientists of modern Europe.

History repeats itself and we find that modernization took place in Greece. In the Greco-Roman period in particular great emphasis was visible on the internal emotion and experience rather than on external rituals or laws (imperatives); on rather mystical or rational religion than legal religion or the religion of law. Euripides may be taken as an exemplary personality who stood against the past conservatism and as a representative of (or even as one of the persons who ushered in) the age of enlightenment in the then Greece. (We will for the present

ignore the view of those who will distinguish between Euripides's personal view and views expressed in his literary work.) Euripides had personal contact with or intimate knowledge of the views of Anaxagoras, Protagoras and even Socrates. He was a poet and hence a well worked out intellectual system of philosophy or religion should not to be expected from him. Though he seems to be somewhat ambivalent in his attitude to polytheism as such, his literature makes no secret of his antagonism to mythological and personal gods of polytheism. He introduced in Greek culture a new note of, so to say, Protestantism and criticism. He did not share the mystic belief in after life. Even so he did not assume the role of a systematic reformer or critique of popular beliefs and practices of his time. Implications are there that he had no sympathy with the divine vindictiveness or licentiousness or stories about them. He is evidently touched by the new idea that vengeance was alien to the perfect nature of God; this was still more strongly proclaimed by the Pythagoreans, by Plato, and later philosophers.¹⁰³ Here is the clear evidence of the emergence of the *ethical* notion of god. What is more important is that Euripides clearly perceived and expressed like nobody before him (except in Egypt) that purity in every sense was essential to the divine nature and, we may add, in the life of every truly religious man. It seems that he used to believe that the evil in religious practice and legend arises out of anthropomorphism which leads men to ascribe to God their own evil nature. This seems to be the earliest attempt to reconcile the fact of evil with the conception of god – a problem which is still as rife as it was before.¹⁰⁴ All these show the development of Greek religion to a higher form, to a spiritual and sort of universal religion. He protested against human sacrifice as Barbaric and

non-Hellenic practice and about some other sacrifices he had some very lofty things to say. He held that God did not want anything, any sacrifice from the mortals. And he is reported to have also said that a small sacrifice from a pious individual weighed more with gods than hecatomb.

Euripides, however, was not the originator of the spirit of modernism and enlightenment in Greece; but he gave public expression to it and thereby helped it to gain wide popularity. The important question to ask is whether immediately there followed any great and widespread social change or whether polytheism immediately yielded place to monotheism. Another question is whether the reformers and modernists had to give high price for their new ideas and views. It is not unnatural, though not entirely correct either, to detect evidences of persecution of the modernizers by the polytheist fanatics in certain well known events. It has been rightly remarked that "Fanaticism, as we are familiar with it in the pages of European and some Semitic history, was happily alien to the Greek temperament. But the banishment of Anaxagoras and Protagoras and the execution of Socrates, by the city that was to become the school-mistress of Greece, might seem to savour somewhat of this temper of mind." But it is to be remembered that "These acts were not inspired solely by religious feelings", or Socrates would have been made a martyr or a saint. Some think that these incidents "are clear proofs that polytheism was by no means moribund and could be dangerous in its own defence."¹⁰⁵ It may be remarked that perhaps the evidences of history show that monotheism and monism promote, at least when they breed mono-

manicism, fanaticism. In self-defence pluralism sometimes reacts with some vengeance.

Contemporary India is witness to some rare example of this truth. However, such situation is more hastily condemned than patiently understood by the majority of the intellectuals of India. Even when they are atheist, non-religious or indifferent to religion, the intellectuals are favourably inclined to certain position which is produced by sort of confusion between metaphysical monism or non-dualism on the one hand and religious monotheism on the other.¹⁰⁶ These intellectuals seem to confuse also between monotheistic religion and non-theistic religion. Some again are believers in the theory of non-dualism and non-theistic religion while they practice what are clearly idolatrous rituals of some strongly theistic religion such as Hinduism notwithstanding the fact that they are predisposed to critiquing and condemning anything they can associate with what they call 'polytheistic Hinduism'. They simply write off polytheism as such and have very poor understanding and appreciation of the unique nature of the system of Hindu polytheism. They often do not or cannot distinguish between the defensively active polytheism and the violent, aggressive and fanatic monotheism.¹⁰⁷ We may have to discuss this feature a little later.

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To bring our story of the Greek religion, to which Judaism is partially indebted, to a conclusion, the movement away from polytheism had indeed been a sign of the development towards modernization. The terms modernization and reform are neither simple in their connotation nor are they fully clear. There may be some ambivalence so far as the direction and goal of modernization are

concerned. In modernism as well as movement of modernization there is a tendency to emphasize more and more the humanitarian and social values which turn formal and ritualistic religion to civic and humanitarian ‘religion’. Such religion in its turn helps social growth and the practice of social service. Sometimes modern people and the modernizers are inclined towards monotheism partly because they have (to some extent) the wrong idea that monotheism is a form of non-ritualistic religion and or because of that it suits the modern minds characterized by the spirit of rationality and intellectualism. Modernism (particularly with the non atheists) sees (largely correctly) in monotheism more emphasis on the internal spiritual growth in the personal life of an individual and on the religious experience and emotion. Formal religion breeds hypocrisy behind external conformity to formal rules and rituals. For some such reason it has been thought as noted earlier that monotheism often leads to the development of religion along personal life of seclusion and contemplation¹⁰⁸ and ultimately even to mysticism. But emotional approach to religious matters of the modern monotheists has the tendency of producing pseudo mysticism which is no less dangerous than the alleged religious bigotry of the earlier and conservative religious people of the world.

To reiterate, the division of religions into the Semitic and non-Semitic, which is familiar in the discipline of comparative religion, seems to fail to do justice to the pre-Semitic religions and religious thoughts and systems like those which emerged in ancient Greece or India (and even to some extent in ancient Rome). Many of the noble features and thoughts we associate with monotheistic Christianity as the first religion to fully realize the lofty ideals of (best) religion can be found in the

Greek culture of the sixth and fifth century B. C. and this fact could not be unknown among the post Hellenistic Christians. The enlightenment and modernism which Euripides popularized in Greece resulted in making the then religion, the religious life and conduct of men, more spiritual and more inward. The moral judgment did not refer exclusively or primarily to the conformity with the rules and laws but (or but also) to look to the inner thoughts and motives, to the heart of the agent, or the spiritual principles involved. God came to be believed as one who was just and knew the inner thoughts of the people and always judged their actions accordingly. He did not judge them by the external form or consequences of the acts they performed. Formal purity and rituals became less and less important. Purity of the soul was considered to be the most important thing. In view of such modernization of religion and religious thought in Greece it seems entirely correct to hold "such thoughts as these, which could serve the foundation-stones of a new religion, and which helped to shape the later religious history of Europe, were mainly a heritage from the speculation of the 6th century of., and in the air of the fifth."¹⁰⁹

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Before we end this account we would like to note a few other features of importance. We saw before that the ritualistic religion or the practice of rituals was not immediately discontinued following the said modernization. All the noted intellectuals did not start speaking explicitly against rituals. We need to understand properly why this was so. During the (early) period of (authentic) modernization in Greece more mindful, mature, positive and creative intellectuals could combine the value and spirit of rationalism and free inquiry with the respect for

their ancestors who were honest and wise. They preferred to reinterpret the rituals and religions of previous ages instead of denouncing them outright. What Aristotle said in his *Politics* about the practice of phallic ritual of Greece,¹¹⁰ which was being continued even in his time, should be read and understood in this light. He did not make short of his job simply by pronouncing it impure and recommending its abandonment. In some of his fragments Heraclitus was an exception rather than rule in explicitly denouncing and ridiculing phallic ritual or the ritual of worshipping idol and praying to it. Plato cannot be placed in this camp. And to the sentiment of majority of laity and literati the words of Lysias had considerable appeal: "it is prudent to maintain the same sacrifices as had been ordained by our ancestors who made our city great, if for no other reason than for the sake of the city's luck".¹¹¹ Anyway, extreme Protestantism¹¹² is rather rash and bohemian. In any living culture and religion changes always happen, and happen for various reasons, and in different forms and ways. This is as true of the traditional Greek society as of the traditional Hindu culture. However, till they assume certain intensity and exert wide and great impact on the social and political life of the larger segment of population, that is, till they assume revolutionary proportion, they are not recognized or recorded by historians. In view of this it is difficult to fully accept the remark and judgment that "Greece produced no ardent protestant reformer."¹¹³ It seems a little biased therefore to explain Plato's views about certain religious matters in his *Laws* that are not too revolutionary on the hypothesis that this work belonged to a period of

Plato's life when his intellectual power was already decaying. We are inclined to thinking that any committed philosopher who practises rationality positively and creatively succeeds in effecting, in his own life and philosophy, a healthy combination of deeper understanding of the tradition and respect for and indebtedness to the predecessors on the one hand and on the other hand a creative, futuristic vision and critical temperament.

Be that as it may, Just as modern scientific spirit and thinking of Europe bears the influence of Plato. Christianity of Europe was marked by a transition that was deeply influenced by Plato's religious and spiritual thinking. It is modern thinking which tends to closely associate skepticism with rationality. It is to be admitted that Plato was not a rationalist in the sense of revolutionary reformer or iconoclast. Yet he was not in great favour of many mythological stories and of a culture that valued poets whose cult was a threat to philosophy as inquiry into truth and value which alone could give society its stability. As a follower of Socrates he was not in favour of indiscriminate practice of polytheism but used to believe on the contrary in the existence of a supreme and universal Godhead, who created this universe, and also in the existence of the deities who came next to Him. The supreme God is immortal but neither the deities nor man. Men were created by these deities and not by God. In keeping with the general view and faith of the time he still consented to accepting in some sense borrowed immortality of man. Otherwise a belief in man's previous birth could not be upheld. All said and done Plato was not a skeptic. Nor was he a mystic as the later

movement bearing his name, Neo-Platonism, might make one inclined to think. Many think that in Neo-Platonism religious thinking 'degenerated' into mystic superstition. But this may also be an overstatement into which we do not like to go. Rather we would like to conclude this section with a small quotation which captures well our view in the matter. "Therefore, as the work of Aristotle belongs to the history of European science, so the philosophy of Plato concerns the later history both of pre-Christian and of Christian religious thought."¹¹⁴

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This chapter was not planned primarily to discuss Semitic religions but to expose an actual or possible bias of standard comparative religion and its practice. The categories Semitic and non-Semitic were created only after the emergence of the Semitic religion and primarily with this group of religions in view. These two categories and expressions have some established associations that have much to do with the history of the origin and spread of the three Semitic religions. It is not fully objective to view or describe religions of earlier period of history as non-Semitic religions. It may very well be the case that those religions defy this categorization or resist to be included in any one of the two classes. They may not have many features usually associated with the two categories. Anyway, it is not our plan to discuss each one of the Semitic religions or one or many of them. Such accounts are easily available in the works of comparative religion. A very brief, authentic and perceptive account will be found in an essay by Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya.¹¹⁵

CHAPTER SIX

Interfaith Conflict, Conversion and Re-conversion

Hinduism is one of the major non-Semitic world religions. One important difference of this religion from each of the three major Semitic world religions or at least from the later two of them is that it is not a proselytizing religion. This difference is religious in character and so deserves to be studied with all seriousness. For interfaith relations and religious conflict cannot be understood or explained without reference to this feature and the related phenomenon of religious conversion. We have seen before that the idea and practice of comparative religion involve reference to the comparative assessment of religions. One basis of assessment may be if and how much a certain system of religion promotes or abets religious violence.

Religious diversity and interfaith violence are contingently related. Both presuppose plurality of religions but the second presupposes in addition simultaneous presence and actual meeting of different religions or religious groups. However, simultaneous presence of different religions or religious groups is not a sufficient or even necessary reason why they should conflict. The fact of interfaith conflict on the other hand necessarily implies that there are different religions and further they are not in complete isolation from one another. There are practical men with radical approach who begin straight from the position that conflict of religions is a fact and then suggest the extreme measure: give up religion altogether. This radical solution does not seem to have any prospect. For, we cannot just wish away religion. If we could, if all or even majority of men could give up religion altogether,

then there would not have been the *problem* of interfaith conflict and violence which is a major factor that stands in the way of human happiness and solidarity today.

Before we turn to the issue of religious conflict proper, let us examine if there is any other solution to the problem. We found the most radical solution was the most impractical one. The less radical solution is to make religion a completely personal and private matter. This requires us to treat religion as a matter of just pure subjective belief, faith or feeling.¹¹⁶ However, the fact is that religion belongs to the practical side of man's life. Practice is the heart of religion. Religion is not just a matter of theory or knowledge nor is it just a matter of personal emotion. It relates to how men live and should live, conduct their life, behave with others etc. Those who approach the phenomenon of religion purely intellectually (the jñānavādīn-s) or purely emotionally as a matter of devotion only (the bhaktivādīn-s) they fail to appreciate or emphasize the practical nature of man's religious enterprise.¹¹⁷ Many think that only Hinduism and Judaism give greater importance to practice in comparison to belief or emotion. These are the best two examples of religion of law or ritualistic religion. The fact is that this view is definitely mistaken so far at least the classical Hinduism is concerned. For, it is a system of religion which is marked by the most judicious and balanced combination of all the three aspects of knowledge, devotion and action. If modern men think otherwise, and they do, we need to understand why there is this change of attitude to Hinduism in particular and religion in general. The intellectual and emotional approaches are more popular today. The common reason, it seems, is modern man's antagonism to rituals. Religious practices are

viewed as observing rituals;¹¹⁸ and rituals are believed to be superstitious practices unbecoming of modern men whose approach is basically rational. Modernity and rationality go closely together. So today it is as difficult to admit theistic religion or personal God as it is difficult to approve of the practice of rituals. The radical solution spoken of above should have been the most natural choice today had it not been for the reason that its acceptance is not unproblematic or even possible.

Incidentally it may be asked : Why religious beliefs and emotions are not viewed to be as superstitious as rituals and brought within the scope of the same objection that they are not rational or scientific? Explanation lies in the fact that religion which consists solely of beliefs and emotions is purely personal and private. In public discussion and policy we are primarily concerned with the social. Observing rituals as well as some of its effects have social dimensions and implications. Secondly when belief in God is declared or viewed as irrational, religious beliefs and emotions already stand condemned; for these are essentially related to (belief in) personal God. However, it should be noted that those who, among the modern Hindus in particular, are avowedly religious but condemn rituals speak and behave in a way which suggests, sometimes they also say it in so many words, that the religion they have, and the religion they find acceptable, is scientific at least in the sense that it does not conflict with science.¹¹⁹ This we take to be too simplistic particularly in view of our criticism of Swinburne, who we think made the best and most competent effort to reconcile religion with science, that he did not fully succeed in his effort.¹²⁰ Apart from that, what is so important about the claim that the religion they have is

scientific? It seems that these people want to convince themselves and also others that one source of religious conflict is the faulty approach to religion. The intellectualist or devotional approach to religion ensures freedom from interfaith conflict or religious violence to which dogmatic religions or dogmatic approach to religion inevitably leads. So far it will not be inappropriate if we discuss the science religion issue in this chapter. But we postpone it to a later chapter.¹²¹

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We will try later on to provide an account of religion and explain further the source of what is a necessary presupposition of interfaith conflict and violence, namely, the plurality of religions. We also need to discuss if there is any reasonable solution to the problem of interfaith conflict. Our basic interest is not so much to find some temporary or workable solution to the problem or solution at the social or policy level, but to facilitate a good and durable solution by way of providing the very basis of it. It is needless to say that the basis is the proper and deeper understanding of the problem in question along with the other related matters. The problem of conversion is one among them. We need to understand the nature and origin of this practice in as objective a way as possible.

Two questions that are frequently asked in this context (and for the fuller answer of which we need to wait till a later chapter of this work) are : Why there are so many different religions and why do they clash? Two parts of the question are actually two questions. The first question begins by accepting that there are many religions and this seems to answer the second question. We have already shown that this

is not correct. We may go even further and suggest that the diversity of religion rather than religious unity can solve the problem of religious conflict. The plurality of religion is not at least a necessary source of religious conflict. This does not invalidate the thought that if there were just one religion then there would not have been religious conflict. But such wishful thinking leads us nowhere; rather it has been said might have been is a dangerous pastime. The other dream is that all religious violence and conflict will cease once majority of the people of the world embraces one universal religion. The idea is not new though it was never preached as enthusiastically as some liberal Hindus do. They seem to claim that in recent time they have discovered one universal religion (actual or potential). We have discussed elsewhere the problem and prospect of certain idea of universal religion and the dream men associate with it.¹²² We need not repeat the content here.

Sometimes the problem of multiple religions is put in this way. Why did God create so many religions?¹²³ In which respect He intended the religions to be different? If He was the creator of different religions why did He not create them all at once? Why religions are revealed or communicated by Him to different people through different persons and in different languages? In response it is said that He in His infinite wisdom knew which people at which particular stage of their development needed which particular religion. Every religion is meant for a particular people and it suits them best. No comparison of religion is intended by Him; there is no real basis or justification for comparison either. Every religion is the best possible religion for the people for whom it is meant. It is the fault of human beings that they do not

understand the design of God. The problem of accepting this view is that the revelation or communication of religion by God took the form of scripture. And some scriptures at least explicitly contain statements of comparative assessment about different religions.¹²⁴ Even clear statements of division of men into believers (of the particular religion in question) and non-believers (that is infidel if the religion is Semitic one) are there.¹²⁵ Besides, these scriptures instruct those who accept them to preach the religion among other people, who are thereby implied to be benighted people. How we can ascribe these acts to God and still hold him just? The problem is within religion itself. Religion itself is the root of interfaith conflict which in its turn weakens the religion in question as also religion in general. Certain particular religion makes some provisions or endorses certain practices on the belief that these will strengthen it. Instead they weaken it and ultimately weaken religion in general by introducing biased discriminations between religions and encouraging interfaith conflict.

Just as the source of interfaith conflict lies sometimes within religion itself so also one obvious way of avoiding interfaith conflict is to suggest that the relevant passages of the concerned scripture have not been properly understood. It is eminently possible to interpret and understand these passages in such a way that they would turn out to be consistent with the best possible truths and ideals of religion and with the general conception of religion and God as sources of justice, peace and human happiness. For this and for many other reasons also we feel that it is urgently needed that scholars undertake more serious study of

scriptures both individually and in a comparative mode. But for this it may be required that we go beyond the well known principle of interpretation, the principle of charity, which normally is meant to apply each time to certain single text. We are to interpret any single utterance of a certain particular text in such a way that the text as a whole or the larger part of it turns out consistent and true. In the present case however the question is how to interpret controversial utterances and provision of a scripture in such a way that it turns out to be consistent with the agreed conception and character of God. Theists of the world do not unanimously hold that God has created the universe. But they all agree that God is omniscient, omnipotent, just and kind.¹²⁶ The problem is even if we can reconcile with this conception of God his revealing different scriptures to different people, through different persons and in different languages, we do not find any way of reconciling it with the scriptural provisions for or endorsement of acts of conversion, proselytizing, harsh treatment to members of a different religion or viewing such religion as fake or inferior? Resorting to interpretation or reinterpretation of the passages of the scripture in question seems to be the only solution. But the religion of the sort in question keeps no provision for interpretation. Scripture is God's words and they are meant to be taken literally; interpreting is an act of blasphemy. People say religious fundamentalism comes in many forms. Members of a religion who are otherwise non-violent, practise fundamentalism perhaps unknowingly by insisting on accepting their scripture absolutely literally.

The Hindus are very different in this respect. The āstikas or the conformists (often called orthodox) among them staunchly believe that the Veda is true (has prāmāṇya) and that each and every part of it is so.¹²⁷ Still, or because of that, even the greatest of the leaders of who say this are found to themselves undertake the enterprise of interpreting the Veda, the Scripture of the Hindus, or align with others who do so. The Hindus have developed a whole distinct discipline of knowledge called Mīmāṃsā – the interpretation (vicāra) of utterances of the Veda (vedavākya) – which is devoted to developing the acceptable methodology of interpretation of the scripture and apply it. For them the truth of an utterance is the truth of it under a certain interpretation – the interpretation which brings out methodically the real import (tātparya) of the utterance. Most orthodox Hindus are most committed interpreters of their scripture.

Anyway the fact is this that the members of proselytizing religion are not generally inclined to interpreting the controversial passages of their scripture. They hardly ever explicitly say that their scripture does not really approve of proselytizing or conversion, or severe treatment of those who are outsiders and do not accept the scripture in question or the religion to which it belongs. Whatever they may say when they want to look politically correct, they do not really feel or say that here there is anything wrong. Their point further is that we, the finite human beings, cannot interpret the words of God. (However, see note 127.)

They, otherwise viewed as non-violent fundamentalists, take the other route to justify the passages of their scripture which they admit appear to be inconsistent with the developed religious sentiments and beliefs. They (as for example the Mohammedans) insist that the scripture is the words of God and they are faithfully recorded and any revision or interpretation would be an act of unjust interference and irreligious. The passages mean what they say. The solution which is proposed by these people is the following. God of the Semitic religions particularly Christianity or Islam, exhorts, in certain passages of the respective scriptures, the members of these religions to preach their religion to other people and convert them to Christianity or Islam, as the case may be. God does so because in his infinite wisdom He knows that these people lack true religion and are still in the dark. To save these benighted people and to civilize them the compassionate God includes in the scripture of true religion (read Christianity or Islam) provision for converting Godless people to true religion and bringing them to the loving protection of true God. The passages of the scripture in question and actions recommended therein would have been unjust if they recommended preaching of Christianity or Islam among people who already had a true religion and were in the loving care of true God. To put it differently the missionaries of a religion preach, in obedience to God's expressed will, their religion, which is the true religion, to benefit the people who lack it. Uprooting a true religion is religiously bad but implanting a true religion in a land where there is no religion or where

there is only bad religion is religiously commendable. And God has commanded just this.

The Semitic religion or religions seem to believe that all 'religions' are not created or revealed by God. The so-called scriptures are not words of God or at least not uncorrupted document. In the debated passages of the scripture where provision for conversion and preaching are there God warns man against pseudo religions that have doctrines and practices which exert misleading influence on unsuspecting simple men. If one argues along this line then he eventually comes to suggest that so-called religious conflict is really a conflict between religion and pseudo religion. Interfaith conflict is there not because there are different religions but because there are apart from religion many pseudo religions. It follows then that the solution to interfaith conflict is to get rid of false religions or at least to expose them. But even before that to get rid of the false belief that all religions are true religion.

Many things can be said against the above attempt to defend a religion against the charge of initiating or promoting interfaith conflict through some of its provisions and recommended actions. This defense conflicts with the solution proposed earlier to the other question, why there are so many religions or why God created so many religions. If God created the best religion for every community then one religion should not be taught to men of a different religion. However, we need to discuss a little more about why there are so many religions.

The answer to the question, noted above, why there are so many religions leave many things unclear. It may easily be admitted that God in His infinite wisdom knew which religion would best suit which *community* of people and that He accordingly revealed different religions to different communities. The question is how the individuals formed, prior to having their common revealed religion, the community to which God revealed the religion in question? Which was the determining bond that united those individuals into a certain particular group as members of which, as having that non-religious identity, they were found jointly eligible to receive the particular religion which they eventually got? Supposing that their prior identity was a different but religious identity – that they were a different religious community (or even many different religious communities) – the question is what sort of religion was that. Was that also a revealed one, got from God, or they got it in some other way? What happened to that religion when they got their new religious identity? If and how these two identities remained related? Thus the situation becomes more complicated if we make the reasonable (though not necessary) assumption that each *community* of the concerned people had some other religion before God *revealed* at different particular points of time different particular known religions to them. The assumption is reasonable because it is historically evident that the Semites like the early Greeks had many different religions before God revealed to them the religions of Christianity or Islam. There is no consensus or telling evidence that these were all God revealed religions.¹²⁸ But there is consensus that these religions were different from the Semitic religions in religiously important sense or senses.

The new revealed religious identity replaced one or more earlier *religious* identities, besides marginalizing at least some non-religious identities as well. So far the emergence of each of the revealed Semitic religions must have created in society a situation which was similar to the one that was created when a founded religion like Buddhism was introduced. Newly founded or revealed religion got their members from the pre-existing religious (or non-religious) groups of people. Either some people of the pre-existing groups consciously and willingly became member of the new religion or they were persuaded through some peaceful means to take up the new religion or they were successfully coerced to that end. There seems to be no other alternative or no other alternative worth considering.

It has been said that God created and or revealed at different particular points of time¹²⁹ each one of the (known major) religions as the best suited to and most needed by the concerned community of people of the time. This implies, roughly speaking, that what decides which is a man's religion is in which community he was *born*. And this by and large remains unchanged even after the new religion is introduced. Important question to ask is how a man comes to defend or justify his remaining religious or becoming anti-religious. Those who in later life leave the religion they were born with or in which they were born seem to violate God's will and wisdom. If we waive this point for the present there remain two options, alternatively, excuses for a person to leave his original or earlier religion. He opts for a different religion and becomes member of it leaving his own earlier religion. The other option is that he leaves his own earlier religion and does not take up any new religion and decide to remain anti-religious or non-religious.

We need to note one complication. Just as being religious or being member of a particular religion is not a matter of individual's conscious decision at birth so also change of religion is not always a matter of free choice. History is witness to the fact that conversion under duress far outnumbers change of one's original religion by free choice on the part of a deeply religious person or by some radical religious reformer. Let us reproduce an account, though this one is confined to only Christianity, of one of the most well read persons in the field of comparative religion in recent time. "A third feature of the triumph of religious tolerance in Europe was that the scene of religious excesses in Europe shifted to other continents. Whether they were Catholics or Protestants, Jesuits or Calvinists or Methodists, Baptists or Anabaptists, they all turned to the countries of Asia, Africa and America. They might have differed and debated bitterly amongst themselves on subtle points of theology, which to the outsiders made no sense, but they all agreed that the people of these new continents were benighted and they needed Christian enlightenment. In spreading this light, as they saw it, they used all kinds of methods – force, fraud, persuasion, trade, and lately *social service*. In this self-chosen task, the white man's burden, the energy of Europe found a new outlet."¹³⁰ There are also examples, perhaps far less in number, of educated person changing his original religion in protest (failing perhaps to reform it or having lost all hope that it could be reformed partly because the religious tradition in question did not give him enough importance or whatever) and converting to some other religion.¹³¹ Ambedkar's willing conversion to Buddhism is one such recent example. Though it is quite interesting why Ambedkar decided to convert to Buddhism and not to Christianity or

Islam.¹³² The other case of a sort of group conversion to Christianity which created great controversy and started long debate and exchange of about 50 published articles or letters¹³³ cannot be regarded as a case of equally mature decision on the part of the converts of a matter of their free or informed choice.

Our immediate interest is not which means is adopted for conversion and whether certain particular means is bad compared to others. Our immediate interest is to understand the nature and origin of conversion which many think is an evil per se. Plurality of religions itself is not enough explanation of the existence or necessity of conversion. We cited the cases above to show that conversion takes place due to human decision – decision of one or the other or both the parties, the converter and the converted, – whether of individual or group of individuals. It cannot be denied, as we saw above, that in case of some religions there is supposed inducement from God. The scriptures, recorded words of God, of these religions keep room for conversion and praise the converter. We have indicated elsewhere that whenever a new religion is introduced it gets its members by converting members of other religions by whatever means. This may be so when a certain human individual starts a new religion. But in the present case and account God reveals a new and suitable religion to a certain *community* of people.¹³⁴ Every one of the several revealed religions so far has already enough members. When members of such religions convert people of other faith they do it on the belief that either the people to be converted have no religion or the religion they have is of an inferior nature. Thus the provision and practice of conversion always go with comparative assessment of religions at least by the religious group

which believes that converting suitable other people is a religiously commendable act, even a duty.

Within the Semitic group one Semitic religion sometimes thinks itself superior to other Semitic religion or religions. But neither such judgment nor the implementation of it seems to be radical. For explicit scriptural admission is in favour of the truth that all Semitic religions belong to the same Abrahamic lineage and are equally revealed by God. None of the Semitic group denies the *God*¹³⁵ of the other group. All the three groups of the Semites in question believe that they are the worshipper of the same God. But if there are people who did not have as yet the light of true religion, religion revealed by *true* God, they should be converted for their own benefit. Converting a people means making available to them the true religion. But is there any false religion? The Semites seem to believe¹³⁶ all non-Semitic religions are bad or false religion. These are not revealed by God. The thinking of the Semites seems to proceed along this line. God is one and they worship this God. The God they worship is the only God.¹³⁷ There is no evidence in the (Semite) scriptures that this God has revealed any one of the non-Semitic religions like Hinduism. Since Hinduism and such other religions are not revealed by God (that is, the God of the Semites who is the only God) they are inferior to any one of the Semitic religions. These benighted people are living under bad or false religion. It is religiously commendable to share with them the light of true religion. And this sharing of true religion with ignorant people is called conversion – a word which has become a pejorative term. This explains why the Christians and the Muslims made Hindus one of the major target populations of their missionary and conversion activity and programme.

Once they are convinced or indoctrinated that Hinduism etc. are false religion and not revealed by God the Semites are in extreme haste to find proofs or evidences to strengthen their belief. Soon they find or invent any number of such evidences. These non-Semites are idolatrous, polytheistic and so on. The sum and substance is that once Semitic religion is admitted to be good every feature of it is a maker of good religion or is a good religion making feature and its absence in a religion is enough proof of its comparative or even absolute inferiority. Such a mentality does not allow the Semitic people (exceptions are always there) either to view these religions from the point of view of an insider or to critically examine their own view about these religions and the evidences on which their view is based. They equally fail, it seems, to take seriously what these other religions say about the Semitic religions. The standard comparative religion because of its (unofficial) stand of avoiding comparative assessment (which they confuse with neutrality or objectivity) hardly ever stops to consider that Hinduism at least is a standing refutation of their scheme of division of religions into monotheistic and polytheistic. It is not noticed that Hinduism is neither or both.

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We gave our argument why the origin of conversion should not be sought in the compulsion on the part of the religion that emerged or revealed later to procure members for it, though this is usually thought to be the case. We have also shown where the origin is to be sought. Let us speculate a little about what would have happened if all the major religions were contemporaneous. In that case also our explanation about the origin of conversion given above would theoretically hold. But

there would be less chance of acrimonious relationship. Living together always and from the beginning would have grown into such a habit and the experience of the comfort of it would have been such a great desideratum that no religion or religious community would normally disturb it or play to that end the bully in relation to any one of its religious other. They would learn by example and habit even before they could gather theoretical justification for it, how one could practise exclusiveness with accommodation.

To put the things differently, if a certain religion appears late and emerges with the explicit awareness of another pre-existing and established religion then it feels a sort of obligation and compulsion to prove its own worth, even superiority, vis-a-vis the older religion. The easier way to do that is to somehow undermine the value of the older religion, to find fault with it, to play bully in relation to the members of it. This leads the members of later religions to adopt violent means or indulge in violence. If a community belonging to a later religion is more discerning and wise, as it happened to be to a large extent in case of Buddhism and Jainism, then it realizes that non-violence is beneficial for both. Let not the older religion take to the path of persecution or the later religion compel the older one to adopt that violent means by its indiscretion, adventurism and tendency to play the bully. So a part of the reason for conversion lies in the non-simultaneity of religions. Often the older is more peaceful than the later because it feels more confident having had longer successful run. But theoretically it is equally possible that the older religion will be jealous and big brotherly in its attitude to the younger religions leading the latter to violence of some form or

other. We have cited sort of evidences of some such thing while discussing the development of religion in early Greece.

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Let us pursue a little more the issue of religious conversion which is one of the major sources of interfaith clash and violence. There are two aspects of it. The passage just quoted above makes reference to objectionable methods of proselytizing. While fully agreeing that it is unjust to adopt those objectionable methods one may still remain unconvinced that proselytizing or missionary activity per se is anything bad though people like Mahatma Gandhi think, it seems, along this line. An authentic act of proselytizing involves evaluative judgment. The religion, the members of which are made the target of proselytizing act is a false, fake or inferior religion. The religion of the converter is, on the other hand, a better if not the best religion. The question that remains to be settled is what is the rational basis of such evaluation in general or in a certain particular case? It is doubtful if the question can be objectively answered remaining wholly within religion. It seems the question is not just whether there are passages in the concerned scripture justifying or recommending conversion. The point is whether it tallies well with universal reason in the sense of conscience or whether it is rationally justifiable. In the previous case we resort to morality and in the latter to epistemology. From the standpoint of realist philosophy we adopt here, neither religion is expected to be so mythical that it is not normally compatible with epistemology or logic, nor again logic or epistemology is necessarily or even usually independent of or opposed to scripture.¹³⁸ The other consideration is how much conversion is compatible with the best religious sentiment and value.

Tolerance or accommodation is one great religious virtue. In one of its senses religious tolerance would demand that the members of a religion should not do anything to convert the people of another religion even if it is true that the former religion is superior or even the only true religion. If the concerned individual or community decides on its own to convert then that may be allowed provided all legitimate persuasions fail to make it change its decision. But what is the argument in favour of exercising such tolerance? One is that the comparative assessment to be relied on to justify the act of converting others may be defective. Otherwise also, even if the judgment was true, the inferior religion should be given a chance to improve; it should be allowed to improve on its own with occasional and limited help of others if necessary. Further who knows, the man converted may not find the new religion suitable and may make far less religious progress than he was doing or could do staying in his original religion. Besides people may prove to be far less creative when they join (by choice or under pressure) a new religion; they may not succeed in making much positive contribution they may even do harm to their new religion. Another argument which pro toleration people give is that every faith should be allowed to originate and stay as otherwise we run the risk of missing out on one aspect of the whole truth, the total religion – which is religion proper – or the source of all particular religions, or the wisdom, as the Theosophists call it.¹³⁹

Some may say it was not so much a religious issue before or even today. It is also fairly known what conditions have made intolerance so intense or widespread. Even so, hardly anybody, terrorists apart, pleads guilty to the charge of religious violence or intolerance or owns up the

responsibility if any act of religious violence takes place. Knowingly or unknowingly religious conflict and intolerance is camouflaged as war of liberation or freedom etc.¹⁴⁰ The religious fundamentalists often challenge politicians and lawyers to decide whether one is a terrorist or freedom fighter, a Jehādi or an Āzādi. Surely more than semantics is involved here. Philosophers are adept not only in semantics but also in analysis and argument. Why should not then philosophers be interested or involved in issues like religious intolerance?

A philosopher may ask independently or from the point of view of one who allegedly practises or supports religious intolerance, what is tolerance? What one is supposed to understand by religious tolerance; why it should be practised or why the practice of it should be considered a value? In the context of knowledge no one wants or suggests that every belief should be accepted, let alone accepted as true. It is not expected that we should act so as to ensure that every belief, even false belief, be allowed to stay and grow. Similarly in the context of religion, if all religions are equally good or bad, say, or right or wrong, then, in that case, there will be no question of choice or selective acceptance or rejection of one particular religion in preference to another ; for there will be no rational ground for the choice. In such a case, the question of religious tolerance loses meaning. Does tolerance mean accommodating or accepting the wrong or the false and in the context of religion does it mean accepting or accommodating the wrong or the false religion? It perhaps means sharing social space with every religion or religious people to the extent that the question or consideration of comparative evaluation finds no place. If all religions are equal then there is no question of tolerating another religion in the sense in which who or

which tolerates is better than who or which is tolerated. To put it differently religious tolerance means sharing in the sense just specified. The expression tolerance has been found objectionable and was recommended to be replaced by the word accommodation. Better still, it seems, to replace it by the word sharing.

It is still possible to ask the question do we have good logical or religiously relevant ground for distinguishing religions into right and wrong or good and bad; or do we really have any good ground to say that all religions stand at par? If not, then to remain equally tolerant in respect of all religions may be at its best a politically correct stance. It would amount to consciously or deliberately overlooking the actual differences that are there between religions – not recognizing the quality of a superior religion and ignoring the defects of the inferior one. Could this be possible, could this be the meaning of religious tolerance or sharing? Sometimes the state policy of secularism, the public reason in favour of practice of equal freedom for all religions, comes to little more than this. Intolerance is the opposite of tolerance. It would be intolerance if we take negative attitude to a religion, irrespective of its merit or demerit, just because it is *another* religion. If a community of people refuses to accept any religion as religion or allow its practice just because it is not the religion of the community in question then it would be a case of religious intolerance. Where such condition prevails a person may be disallowed to leave his own religion, even if he finds it deficient, or join another religion which he finds to be a better one. Theoretically it is possible for a certain person or community to be religiously intolerant. Suppose there is an inferior or bad religion in the vicinity. One may feel intolerant to it for the good religious reason that

the presence of such an inferior religion may harm the better or the best religion or the people of the concerned community. Would intolerance in such cases be anything wrong in principle or could tolerance be a virtue on such occasion? This question needs to be examined and should not be bypassed in consideration of the known fact that in any concrete situation it is very hard to decide objectively and convincingly that a certain religion is inferior or that one is authentically religiously intolerant.

It is not theoretically impossible that some member of a particular religion will succeed, after thorough study and examination, in convincing him that *his* religion is truly and objectively superior to all or some other religion. If such a person makes public his findings and defends them and advises others, particularly those whose good is a matter of concern for him, to convert to his religion, in case they currently happen to be a member of some comparatively inferior religion, then would that be a case of religious intolerance or objectionable proselytizing? Why one should not have the right to express the truth or do well to others. He may even argue that it is a great virtue to preach the truth even when opposed just as it is normally a duty to administer life saving medicine to a patient in spite of all his resistance and protest.

It is true that such a situation arises only when the difference between religions as good and bad, as well as our judgment to that effect, is objective and that one has acceptable means of knowing that this is so. We grant this and also understand that if any one of these conditions is not satisfied, or it can be proved that one or both the claims are false in principle then it will be a case of religious intolerance

either to say that one religion is better or another religion is inferior. But do we have good and convincing reason to say that in principle all religions are equally good or bad, developed or undeveloped and so on; that in principle nobody can *know* a religion to be comparatively better or worse. Will it be true or reasonable to say that there *cannot* be objective principle of comparative assessment?

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One more argument against conversion per se is that even if someone seeks to convert me into a better religion on sound and objective considerations it will still be my duty not to allow that; I should not consent to getting converted.¹⁴¹ Rather I should stay in my own religion and try as best as possible to remove the deficiencies of it and help it improving. At least nobody expects me to leave my ailing old parent just because there is no known cure of his ailment. Rammohan and others were acutely aware of the deficiencies of the prevalent Hinduism of their time but they did not defect to other religion. There must be some good reason for that also. So we may be thankful to one who on objective ground has concluded that his religion is comparatively better than mine and out of love for me wants to convert me to that. But I should tell him that he did not perhaps carefully thought about the matter. Love and desire to share what is good with others are good religious sentiments. Sacrifice is also a great virtue and every religion worth the name accepts it to be so. Therefore while appreciating the gesture of my good friend, I should remain with my hapless friends and relatives, should not desert my own religion rather should try to improve it sacrificing my personal good luck in the form of membership of a better religion. My friend will still have an argument.

He would say that best way of caring for my hapless friends and relatives would be to persuade them to convert them and set a good example for them by converting myself. First, this rejoinder ignores part of what is said above that I should not desert my religion. Besides the attitude my friend takes is the externalist attitude to religion: do look after yourself and let your religion fend for itself. The insider's primary consideration is not what religion has done to him or could do to him. He gives precedence to the consideration what he could or should do to it. Leaving my poor village and villagers and shift to town may be the consideration of the outsider. I will stay in my village so long my village needs my service, even if that entails some personal sacrifice is the way of the insider. So far from an insider's point of view it will not be justified for me to convert into another religion even if that one is objectively superior. Similarly it will not be justified for me to convert anyone to my religion even if my religion were objectively better. The person to be converted has a duty to his own religion and I would have poor opinion in a religiously relevant sense about him if he were unaware of it or rated his own interest above the interest of his religion.

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There are other considerations against conversion. First it is not convincing that God will reveal false religion to any community. Nor is it convincing that He would declare in the scripture, revealed to a community, say the Semites, that He had done so.¹⁴² Suppose that He did not reveal that false religion but someone else, say the Satan, did it. And now to correct that and save that hapless community God now wants the Semitic people, to whom He himself had revealed the true religion, should preach the true religion to them. How much is this

convincing? Instead of making the true religion available through the Semites God Himself could have revealed to this community the true religion even before Satan could teach them the false religion. Or He could have prevented the Satan from misleading some people by preaching false religion to them. He in his infinite wisdom and omnipotence could have done any one of these things and save the people in question to be initiated to a false religion and then take tuition from another religious community and finally change the earlier religion and get converted to another. The same argument or consideration would apply if one argues these men first committed the sin by disobeying God. But God being all kind still arranges to save them.

We have seen that it is hard to find independent rational argument to decide which, if any, religion is objectively superior and which is not. However this is not enough to explain why there should be religious conflict unless one religion seeks to impose itself on another. Mere superiority of a religion is not enough justification of imposing it on another community. Rather one can argue that no religion (religious community) can be regarded religiously superior if it imposes itself (its religion) on another community. Transformation and development of a religion or religious community would and should come from within. To facilitate or contribute positively to that end would be even a religiously commendable act. At the individual level and from the insider's standpoint also conversion is neither natural nor most commendable. We are yet to examine if there is any religious ground to oppose conversion per se. Though not made clear by him, Gandhi had some of the considerations sketched above in mind when he opposed conversion almost¹⁴³ under every condition.

Among recent personalities who opposed proselytizing in principle Gandhi is one. He practised religious tolerance lifelong and is well known as one who was “against religious conversion per se”.¹⁴⁴ He once told that the Christians were welcome if they came to India and stayed as our friends and guest and practice their own religion; but they were not welcome if they decide to come to preach their religion to us. What could be the ground for opposing conversion? Gandhi used to think that conversion was a case of “spiritual violence”. But one needs argument and not simply comment or remark. Where is there intolerance in preaching one’s religion if it is objectively superior? There should be some religiously relevant and important argument against religious conversion as such. This we sought to sketch above. But some religious man who is in favour of conversion may hold that rational arguments have no place in religion. The only and finally acceptable consideration is what God says. They even go to the extent of holding that only God created or revealed religion is the genuine religion. Like the Semites the Hindus also believe that God is the creator of their religion.¹⁴⁵ However, though the distinction between manmade historical religion and God made ahistorical religion is valid yet the so-called men we credit with creating or founding religion like Buddhism are not ordinary men. Even before they were raised to the status of God they were viewed by a large section of people as extraordinary and with unexcelled divine disposition. This can easily be verified in the example of Buddha and Jesus. Even though Buddha is not officially called God, his words are regarded and obeyed just as God’s words. Jesus and more so Mohammad is regarded as special in that God spoke through them. It is the inspired words of these men, particularly in case of the Semitic

religion, that constituted the creed or the scripture of the respective religion. Therefore for the present at least we are inclined to disregard this distinction as important.¹⁴⁶ The point of the ‘pro-conversion’ argument is that no truly religious man can go against the Will of God. However, if religion is the creation of man then since every man is imperfect, though the degree of their imperfection may vary, some religions could be better and some worse. On the hypothesis that all religions, like theology, are created by man, religions could be all equal, equally good, only on the hypothesis that all men were equally good at creating the best religion. In that case there could be no rational argument for choosing between religions or for conversion, forced or willing. But so far as God created or revealed religions like Christianity and in the scriptures, which are words of God, there is provision for conversion then nothing can count against it. Nor can we question God’s freedom to create many different religions at different points of time etc. The final question is what would amount to violating God’s will – the practice of conversion or abandonment of it. We saw that the practice is against the best of religious sentiments and values and it is against reason including rational arguments from the nature of God and religion. Under such circumstance explicit scriptural utterances, if any, which endorse conversion must be rejected as spurious or interpreted or reinterpreted in such a way that they do not contradict the sentiments, values or reason as above. There are religious communities which consider as disvalue the blind acceptance of text as well as exercise of freelance rationality without commitment. It is recommended that the exercise of rationality should be constrained by reverential reception of the text (*śravana*) and the faith in the text

should be accompanied by proper interpretation¹⁴⁷ and rational consideration.¹⁴⁸

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We have suggested above a way of avoiding religious conflict which is consistent with the philosophy of robust realism and its doctrine of religious pluralism. This doctrine contends that religious diversity has both empirical and theoretical support. It is a fact of common experience and is well attested by worldwide religious practice. Further, there is no convincing theoretical argument against it which is religiously important. But some seek to avoid religious conflict in another way, by way of introducing a different sort of religious monism which denies religious diversity in a different way. The advocates of this form of religious monism say that each one of the many religions within the religious diversity is sectarian and imperfect. All of them have their use but it is a mistake to take all of them as best or proper. The real religion is only one and universal. This one religion, the universal religion, is the religion of all men. We have discussed elsewhere the thesis of unity or harmony of religions, particularly as it is being advocated by some modern liberal Hindus. However, in the present context it is reasonable to remark that the preaching of this religion on the part of the concerned missionaries would be a case of proselytizing activity and religious conversion. Besides these missionaries run the risk of falling easy prey to the romantic dream, if they are not already so, that the whole world and all religious denominations will get converted to this universal religion someday in real time. The liberal Hindus in question, however, seem to hold that they are not interested in making a factual statement that all men in the

world will be converted to this universal religion but to the extent they do they would be saved from the evils and dangers of the modern age. One may hope so, but still would refuse to discuss this since that may be an exercise in futility. There are many points of theory at least which the advocates of universal religion do not make sufficiently clear. Is this universal religion a realized fact or a project? If it is a realized fact, then is it a revealed or a founded religion? Does it have a scripture, what is it? Which cult, creed or scheme of values is associated with it? Some liberal Hindus make short of their job by putting forth the claim that this religion is a realized fact and it is nothing other than *Vedānta*. This doctrine, or this version of the doctrine of universal religion is, to say the least, undeveloped; its conceptual foundation seems to be very weak and lastly in their actual practice some of the advocates seem to accept what may be said to be idolatrous rituals. As such there is little practical viability of this universal religion or this solution of interfaith conflict. We will not discuss this doctrine here anymore.

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Before we end this chapter we need to discuss, however briefly, the issue of re-conversion. We have seen that the practice of religious conversion is not based simultaneously on mature thinking on the one hand and deep religious sentiments or dispositions. A genuine religious man is likely to manifest in his talks and behavior really profound trust in God and His ways, love for fellow human beings and respect for their freedom, awareness of personal imperfections and attitude of self abnegation and the like. Those who convert people of different faith are, however, when they are not conscious tormentor or oppressor, at least mistaken and arrogant. If we go by facts and empirical evidences

then we find that there are innumerable cases where conversion had been effected through threat or fraud or both. Against this background question of re-conversion has been raised and debated. The question is can we now introduce the provision of re-conversion where there is no provision for conversion, as in Hinduism? This question has many dimensions. It may be understood as the same question as "Would it not be socially expedient or politically prudent to introduce the provision of re-conversion?" We will examine the issue primarily as a religious one. First it may be remarked that re-conversion is also a case of conversion though (second or third or whatever) not the first conversion. So far for a religion which already has provision for conversion re-conversion is not a problem. Introducing provision for re-conversion in a religion where there is no provision for conversion would be to introduce a provision for conversion. All that we have said above against conversion would therefore hold against re-conversion also. One may argue, perhaps correctly, that this is not strictly so. For if the considerations we advanced as criticism of conversion are admitted then conversion is a case of doing an action that is religiously wrong. Re-conversion is importantly different. It is an act of setting right the wrong done earlier. So re-conversion cannot be just another case of conversion or for that reason a religiously wrong action.

Apart from the question of principle the question of method is also there. Even if we agree to re-convert what will be the acceptable method? Conversion can be of two types. First, there are and certainly can be cases of conscious and willing conversion. If arguments given above are correct then even such conversion will be religiously wrong. That is however a different matter; or, because their conversion was

wrong they may seek re-conversion to their old religion on a later date if they realize their mistake. We will return to this point presently but first it should be noted that exceedingly large number of conversion is not of this first type. Conversion of the second type is either unconscious or unwilling (or both). In case it is unconscious, conversion without knowledge, there are two possibilities. The person converted was too young or was already through the process of conversion even before he could realize (and there may be various reasons for this) what was happening. The second possibility or variation is more bizarre but not very rare. In this case the person was quite mature and was fully conscious throughout the entire process of what people call conversion; but he did not really know that this process was actually the process of conversion or what its implications were; so far for all practical purposes he was unconscious about conversion. During his field work a sociologist is reported to have met a woman who provided best example of such conversion. It was found that even after conversion she did not give up her earlier religious practices. When this was pointed out to her she was annoyed and was reported to have said "What do you mean? Have I left my dharma because I have become a Christian?"

To turn to the second type of conversion, when a man is converted into a different religion by bribing, fraud or force he is not free, not in a position to act freely. Or suppose he was misled or deceived to thinking that he was doing the right 'thing' by opting to convert himself. Now in case such a person is later found to be repentant and wanting to come back to his earlier and original religion should we not allow him to re-convert? Would it be religiously or morally right not to allow him to re-convert? Some people appear to

think that in such cases his conversion had no sanctity. He, therefore had never really left his religion, he was never really converted, so without any fuss he should be allowed to practise his earlier religion and be treated, as before, a member of that religious community. In short conversion based on creating false belief is no real conversion and hence his re-conversion will be a notional re-conversion only. The question of real re-conversion does not arise. Thus without rejecting any of the things said against conversion earlier we can accept such re-conversions. Many of my friends are of this opinion and they find their strongest support in Gandhi. "If a person, through fear, compulsion, starvation or for material gain or consideration, goes over to another faith, it is a misnomer to call it conversion."¹⁴⁹ The cases like these are "not cases of conversion. I would, therefore, unhesitatingly re-admit to the Hindu fold all such *repentants* without ado, certainly without *suddhi*."¹⁵⁰ One comment people will like to make is that if the people were forcibly converted, and hence were not *really* converted, there is hardly any question of their feeling repentant. Be that as it may, the method so far seems to be that the concerned person or persons would seek re-conversion and they should be re-admitted. Since both conversion and re-conversion are notional, we would not press for answers to the questions first who they seek to reconvert to or who are (or we) the persons and what eligibility or authority do they have or need must have to re-convert to the old fold the forcibly converted people? The second question is what, if any, would be the procedure of re-conversion? What procedure one is to go through in order to be re-converted? The quoted words of Gandhi indicate that one procedure

of readmitting or re-converting is *suddhi* which is to be followed in some cases of re-conversion at least.

Suddhi is actually an orthodox practice resorted to on many occasions. On certain specific occasions a person is required to go through the process of *suddhi* or *prāyaścitta*. In the present context one would like to know in which case *suddhi* may be felt necessary, if it is not necessary to reconvert the forcibly converted people. According to standard theory *suddhi* and sin go together. One who has committed or attracted sin by some of his previous deed needs to undergo the process of *suddhi*.¹⁵¹ Re-conversion will involve *suddhi* if earlier conversion attracted sin. And it would have attracted sin only if at least two conditions were satisfied. First getting converted¹⁵² must be religiously wrong¹⁵³ or forbidden action and the person in question should be one who falls within the scope of the negative injunction which forbids conversion.¹⁵⁴ These two conditions are largely independent. When both these conditions are fulfilled and conversion has taken place then either one or both the persons involved will normally attract sin. *Suddhi* is required to wipe out that sin and make one eligible for readmission to the old fold. By this logic the famous poet Madhusudan Dutta could not be re-converted without *suddhi*.

The popular (and secular) view in the matter seems to be different. According to it all conversion may not be wrong and may not attract sin. Secondly, where it does what decides the matter is (not scriptural position) but whether or not the conversion was a consequence of free and informed choice especially on the part of the person converted. Gandhi, for example, did not find¹⁵⁵, it seems, good reason why it must be religiously or morally wrong to willingly convert

oneself to a different faith. Gandhi himself foresaw a certain hypothetical situation, when he surmised he would be willing convert himself to another faith. Thus Gandhi did not find anything wrong in a conversion if it was based on informed decision and honest conviction. The conditions for genuine conversion – consciousness and freedom – when fulfilled, ensure that no sin is committed or attracted. On the other hand if one is forcibly converted then also the person had not done anything wrong. It follows then that in none of the two (types of) cases – of getting converted willingly and being converted forcibly – the concerned person or persons attract any sin. According to Gandhi type argument they could be reconverted, if they wanted, "without ado".¹⁵⁶ We need to note here a number of points. The popular and Gandhi type argument tends to show that no sin is committed in any of the two types of case of conversion and yet in one case only the conversion is genuine. It may strike anomalous to say that genuine conversion attracts no sin. Some may think that this can be easily reconciled. In case of genuine conversion none of the two parties – the converter and the converted – commits sin.¹⁵⁷ In case of forcible conversion the converted will not commit or attract sin, the person who converts will both commit and attract sin. The case may be a little more complicated and be viewed in a different way. In case of conscious and willing conversion or genuine conversion if the converter is a different person than the converted then we cannot mechanically say that none of the two commits sin. In this case two acts have been performed. The converter may seem to be less responsible than the converted and runs greater risk of being judged wrong. He gives precedence and preference to his own desire and thinking over those of God. Granting that the act

of conversion is wrong and hence both the parties involved in conversion are at fault, the converted in case of genuine conversion is doubly at fault. If in case of forced conversion the converter is more responsible in the other case it is the reverse.

The popular view in the matter contends that the converted is not wrong in case of either forced conversion or willing conversion. However, in one case the conversion is notional and in the other case it is real. Accordingly if re-conversions took place then one would have been notional and the other real. Let us assume for the present that re-conversion is always conscious and willing. Where conversion is genuine, based on knowledge and conviction, there cannot be re-conversion. Or it will show that earlier belief that the original religion was wrong and it was good to shift to some other religion was false. Such conscious and willing conversion was based on what was thought to be knowledge but was not so. By the previous logic, this cannot be a case of genuine conversion as it is not based on knowledge. Re-conversion is always notional then.

From a strictly religious point of view conversion is wrong and if in a situation it takes place then every party involved in it is wrong, to some extent only.¹⁵⁸ The following argument however tends to show that conversion is never wrong and hence re-conversion is always notional. The argument runs as follows. Either the person is converted against his will and hence not responsible or he in converting himself acts on good faith, given further that he is free to act according to his best judgment, we cannot say he commits anything wrong. We land ourselves in a queer situation it seems if we try to combine the religious point of view with the popular point of view. For then the act of

conversion is wrong, the person who converts is also wrong but who gets converted is not wrong. In case of re-conversion the agent whether the person who reconverts or the person who gets himself re-converted, is not wrong; for it is a different action setting right a previously wrong action. The act of reconversion is perhaps never wrong.¹⁵⁹ The major difference between the points of view is that from the religious point of view the act of conversion is always wrong, but from the popular point of view we are yet to find an objectionable case of conversion.

Theoretically, even practically, it is possible to find a case of genuine conversion, where a certain person willingly and with full knowledge of the situation converts himself with or without the help of a converter who is a different person. Suppose one does not believe that his religion is inferior or that the religion to which he wants to convert is religiously superior and yet for some non religious benefit – which he can arguably at least go without, such as the post of principal in the missionary college in which he is a teacher and is reasonably placed – he willingly converts himself to the second religion without divulging his real reason for conversion. He does injustice to himself (as a religious person) and each of the two religions. It must be a case of sinful conversion even by ordinary standard. Such a converted person necessarily pollutes himself and needs *suddhi* in order to be re-admitted to the old fold (if at all he is to be re-admitted). Which is the polluting act, deception or conversion or both?

All the considerations and reasoning presented so far – whether to decide what should be the reasonable policy for re-conversion or criteria to distinguish different types of conversion and re-conversion –

are based on our independent thinking. Can we decide a case of religious sin or *śuddhi* in this way? The religion or one who authentically represents it would ask who are we (as individual human being) give judgment whether a particular conversion attracts or does not attract sin or what should be the type or quantum of *śuddhi* required?¹⁶⁰ We will briefly come back to it later on.

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Today in India the question of re-conversion is not confined to stray or hypothetical cases. It is discussed at the level of socio-political and religious policy. On the part of a proselytizing religion conversion is not isolated incident or stray act of some arbitrary individuals. It is on the contrary systematic, organized and collective missionary acts commanded or endorsed by the scripture in question. So even if secular reasoning is against religious conversion a member of this religious group would not attract sin if he converts people who do not belong to his religion. It may still be argued that the individual would attract sin if he converts certain persons or group of persons, not belonging to his religion, under the guise of social service and concealing his real motive. For even in the sphere of religion, end cannot justify the means. Such a case of converting people fraudulently is not just a matter of idle imagination. One member of the Salvation Army wrote in a letter to his son "The social work is the bait, but it is salvation [through conversion to Christianity] that is the hook that lands the fish".¹⁶¹ This shows that there are or can be acts of converting people which are religiously wrong (on certain occasions at least) even for the members of a proselytizing religion. Conversion of people who are converted under such conditions may be regarded as notional or even fake. However if

one having complete faith and commitment to his own religion which he sincerely believes to be a superior religion publicly preaches the virtues of it and compares its virtues with what he sincerely thinks to be weak points or deficiencies of a second or third religion then he should be taken as trying to educate people, generate knowledge in them. Suppose further that he does not prevent in any way men of other religion do for their religion which he is doing for his own then the man cannot be accused of doing anything wrong. If under such circumstance a person of one religion after hearing both the parties willingly converts him into a second religion then only it will be a case of fully free and even religiously unobjectionable conversion. Perhaps, it may be said, the religious provision of conversion had only such conversion in view. A genuinely religious person who is rational and deeply committed to his own religion, which happens to be a proselytizing religion, is likely to view religious conversion in this way. Here loyalty to one's religion, complete acceptance of it, converges with secular rationality – practice of independent reasoning which does not make reference to religious authority.

One unobjectionable social programme which can be adopted in India is to generate right knowledge about say Hinduism and make honest comparison of merits and demerits of it with the merits and demerits of other religions with the hope that those who got themselves converted under the influence of ignorance or misinformation can find out the truth and may want to re-convert to their original faith. The Government, even as Government of a secular country, must ensure that these people are not prevented from freely exercising their choice by the people of the interested religion. In this

matter of educating people and generating detailed, analytical, and comparative account of different religions besides making it available for all to access if and when they need it philosophy, more than theology, may have a great role to play. For in the broader perspective one needs to undertake hermeneutical and philosophical study of the relevant scriptures.

So far as Hinduism is concerned the attitude of the modern educated Hindus to the *Veda* and the *Vaidika* literature has been so much transformed and their ignorance of the scripture has become so enormous, that programme or regular study and teaching of the scripture and scriptural literature needs to be started with priority. No truly secular person can be so irrational as to object to the adoption of such a programme. Every rational person or culture admits the value of independent thinking and free inquiry irrespective of which particular subject is being studied and taught. A rational individual cannot afford to dogmatically believe that it has been finally and absolutely conclusively proved that scripture and scriptural knowledge have to be detrimental to the growth of rational culture and progress towards a just and egalitarian society. To critically examine if the scripture has any authority a secular man does not need to accept the scripture as authoritative. But to refuse to examine or re-examine the case is irrational. The programme in question should be launched in tandem with the social programme of educating people as to the actual position of different religions in general as well as with respect to particular issues.

Before we complete the discussion on re-conversion we note a few points which show that we often do not take the matter in its

intricate details or in its enormous reach. We have been talking of individual persons' conversion effected in their ignorance or by coercion, their willingness to be reconverted and their re-admission to the old faith all within the span of a single life. What about the problem or position, when following mass conversion in the past, some people of the converted community seek re-conversion ? Should we reconvert only those who want to come back to the old fold and ignore the rest just because they are yet to gather the requisite knowledge or courage to ask for re-conversion? What about the cases where converted father wants to come back to his original religion but (all or some of) his children (possibly some born before and some after the conversion of their father) do not? Supposing there is some method of readmitting the father in this case, should that method apply automatically to the children also? Are the children convert in the same sense in which their father is a convert? (We avoid the further complicated cases where one of the parents is converted and not the second). Should it be a case of re-converting the father and converting (some of) his children? Is religion a matter of choice or birth? Is birth just a matter of biological procreation? Is forced conversion the result of the person's past karma?

We are of the opinion that whether or not conversion or re-conversion socio-politically just or prudent they are enormously complicated phenomena when viewed impartially and rationally. Because the phenomena are challenging and important philosophers should get themselves involved in studying them. Considered from the point of view of Hindu religion conversion whether willing or forced pollutes the person converted. It itself is a form of suffering necessitated

by his past deed. The only way to exhaust the relevant *karma* is to suffer it. By willingly submitting to further suffering called *suddhi* or *prāyaścitta* the converted man may exhaust the karma in question a little early. But in all these matters the *Sāstra* is the authority; our independent secular thinking is of little or no help. However, philosophy or philosophical thinking, as the Hindus understand it, is of great help. Such thinking is exercised consistently with the demand of one's religion; it is committed, constructive and positive thinking and not the exercise of negative and destructive rationality of a freelance thinker. Finally, in view of the discussions above, particularly the enormous complications involved in conversion and re-conversion in actual and concrete cases making provision for them can hardly be an easy job. There is every chance that such provisions may turn out to be either too simple to be of any use or too complicated to be practicable. This could also be a reason in addition to all other considerations presented above why the Hindu scripture does not include provision for or against conversion or for re-conversion.

Part Three: Unity of Religion

CHAPTER SEVEN

Three External Challenges to Religion

Two major parts of the book deal respectively with religious plurality and religious unity. The division is not meant to be taken as absolute. Even in this part reference to *different* religions cannot be avoided; nor is it intended either. The distinction is more notional than real, more methodological than substantive. In this part we will refer to different religions mainly when we find in them *different treatments* of the same issue. In the discussion on proofs for the existence of God, for example, we refer to and even compare, explicitly or implicitly, the theological and philosophical views of Christianity and Hinduism. The literature on this topic is quite considerable in these two religious traditions both in respect of quantity and quality. However, the three challenges to religion to be discussed here are mainly Euro-American in their origin. The challenges make no essential reference to any particular religion, they apply indiscriminately to almost all the religions or religion as such. They bear reference to such common features of religions as belief in the supernatural, in a happier world beyond – in paradise – and the like. We also discuss in this part the belief in the existence of God though there seem to be at least one world religion which is not theistic. We do not consider here the Buddhist arguments against belief in the existence of God.¹⁶²

Challenges that come from a particular religion and are directed against one or more religious systems or some particular feature or features of them are not external challenges. For example, Hinduism is

targeted by the Semitic religions and in addition by Buddhism because Hinduism, they think, allows the practice of idolatry, say. This is a feature not common to other religions. Some such thoughts inclined us to think that it would be convenient if we broadly divide the present work into two parts of which plurality of religion figures more essentially in one and the unity of religion – religion as such or religion in general – in the other.

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In this first chapter of the second part we will mainly discuss three external challenges to religion. But we will not attempt any elaborate, historical or descriptive account of any one or all of them. We will also discuss only briefly some actual or possible responses to them. We also do not plan to discuss separately the challenges and responses. In the critical presentation of the challenges we will include short responses to them as well.

It is a matter of common belief and discussion that religion is envisaged as a source of many social evils and human sufferings. We do not discuss so often if and what harm religion has suffered in our hands, in the hands of social man.¹⁶³ Scientism, Socialism and Pragmatism are three basic ways of thinking and belief which are antagonistic to religion. Each of these in its own way undermines or contributes to the undermining of the value and validity of man's religious enterprise. All of them agree that religion did not and does not help the growth of science or society; notwithstanding its avowed aim and objective on the one hand and claim on the other religion did not succeed in ensuring human happiness. History shows that religion has caused untold

miseries to man and has acted more as hindrance than aid to social progress. The second common feature of the three stances is that they all accept science as source of genuine knowledge and truth and also as the most dependable tool of social progress and human happiness. Since scientism is believed or claimed to be the attitude which is the natural and direct implication of science it is central to and shared, to some extent, by the other two positions. Accordingly religion is accused of causing economic exploitation, unjust and often violent social discrimination between individuals or groups of individuals and the killing of individual (often collective) human initiative. The part of the reason why religion means or does all these is that it is not rational; and this constitutes its basic difference from science. Religion is not only not a science, but also not scientific and hence not rational. It is superstitious and depends on authority or tradition. What it produces is not knowledge but often dogmatic belief. We accept on trust or faith what religion tells us; we acquire beliefs which are not supported by evidence. These are more or less the common core of the three external objections that view religion from outside and consider its various evil effects on society.

Are these challenges real or imaginary? Is there any real basis for tracing them to scientism, pragmatism and socialism as their source? The challenges are all real and are facts of history. It is natural to ask what religions did in face of these challenges. Sometimes it has been said that religions behaved in the most submissive way expected of an incorrigible cowardice.¹⁶⁴ The members of these religions either remained silent instead of offering counter challenges or they went a

step further and contributed to the intensification of infighting of a different kind. Each single religion started vying with every other religion to get the recognition that it is a scientific religion. More accurately the followers or admirers of a particular religion of their choice came to believe and say that the religion of their choice is scientific religion. This is as much true of Buddhism as of Vedānta.

The difference of scientism from science, it has been said, is just three additional letters – ‘ism’. However the difference, the three letters create, is enormous. Scholars who are more discerning find that scientism stands more for admiration of science than for the true understanding of it. Many people confuse science with materialism. They fail to notice that materialism is not science but a genuine philosophy of science. This much should be accepted by those who aspire to reject materialism or accuse ‘materialistic science’ as the major source of modern human predicament. Scientism is not science, not even a genuine philosophy of science; it is a certain attitude of making science the measure of all things. The advocates of scientism often confuse between science and scientism. Even when they do not fail to notice the distinction of the two and believe scientism to be a certain attitude, these advocates think and claim that such an attitude is the natural consequence of one’s accepting science and the culture of science. It now follows that nobody can afford to do without scientism since there is no question of not accepting science on the part of a man who is even minimally rational. More discerning people know that scientism is a popular view of science which scientists themselves rarely have or endorse. One component of the popular doctrine of scientism is

that science constitutes the whole of human knowledge and covers the whole of genuine human experience as distinct from the imagination, poetry, mysticism and so on. Nothing outside science or outside the reach and control of science is rational. A man who firmly believes that he is rational, and as such cannot believe which it is not rational (that is, not reasonable by scientific criteria) to believe or do what it is not rational to do, can hardly accept or entertain religious beliefs or indulge in religious practices. For these are all merely superstitious – unscientific or antiscientific. Scientism contends that religion is not possible in the age of science. Men who think that it is the most progressive view or attitude are attracted to scientism. Some others accept it out of fear that they might otherwise be branded as non-progressive, superstitious, reactionary and so on. Fortunately there are also a good number of men who find the hollowness of scientism as representative scientific attitude. We also argued indirectly to that end in other contexts.¹⁶⁵

Some may think that it is wrong to think and say that scientism is a popular view in the pejorative sense of the term. In so far as scientism contends that science is the whole of human knowledge it echoes the conclusion which Kant, the celebrated son of Enlightenment, arrived at after long many years of close and systematic study of the phenomenon of knowledge. The result Kant achieved brought to a successful completion a three hundred years long research project called epistemology. Today's most popular pragmatist holds that after Kant's success epistemology is happily dead¹⁶⁶ and philosophy invented another branch of knowledge in its place to fill up the gap.¹⁶⁷

Those who still believe that scientism is more a matter of popular belief are likely to advance three considerations. The least important one is that in spite of the fact that some contemporary pragmatist¹⁶⁸ celebrates the death of epistemology and has his view indirectly supported by scholar like Michael Dummett,¹⁶⁹ it is only partially true, or is not fully borne out by facts of history that epistemology is dead. The more important and second consideration why we consider scientism to be a popular view is that discerning scientists and philosophers of science are there who want to keep themselves distant from scientism. Putnam, for example, is one such scholar who explicitly says that he wants to dissociate himself from such a view.¹⁷⁰ The implication seems to be that these thinkers do not believe that scientism is really the implication of science or of one's acceptance of science. Our third and most important consideration is that it was never Kant's intention to say that science was the totality of human knowledge except in a special sense of the word knowledge. He was actually eager to find an important and respectable place for man's religious experience. Incidentally the same is true of the famous pragmatist William James who acknowledged the due reality and value of religious experience.¹⁷¹

It is not denied that there is good (not conclusive) reason to attribute to Kant the view that science is the totality of human knowledge. However we should also remember his declared objective. It was to *limit* the scope of knowledge rather than to claim or defend that science exhausted the totality of human experience and interest. He found it imperative to distinguish between knowledge and faith. Faith is

not confined to phenomena, and the price it has to pay for going beyond appearance is to forego the claim to be considered knowledge in the restricted sense of synthetic a priori judgment. So faith is indeed not knowledge in the narrow and technical sense of the term. It is the name for a different kind of experience which need not necessarily be loose or mythical. Its characteristic difference from knowledge, in Kantian philosophy, is that in it the reason is not fully or solely constrained by sense experience. Before we examine further the view of Kant or William James we need to discuss a little more about the three external critiques in question in general.

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What is there in the three positions of scientism, pragmatism and socialism, for which each of them is viewed as a challenge to religion? Science does not have any business to deny the spirit or Spirit, though materialism, the most successful and dominant philosophy (more successful perhaps than even Kant's philosophy) of science, rejects it. However, it appears that, from the point of view of current science, only that can be said to exist, can be recognized to be there, which can be measured that is given a quantitative treatment. Further science as an explanatory theory is confined to finding explanation of only natural phenomena and that too only in terms of other natural phenomena. Scientism goes a step further and denies everything that is either non-natural or non-material. Students of socialist ideology rarely draw any essential distinction between dialectical materialism and historical materialism and between any one of these on the one hand and Marxism on the other. We will argue later that in Marx's naturalistic

humanism there seems to be some place for spirit. This point is hardly ever noticed and people generally believe that just as in dialectical materialism so also in Marxism there is no place for spirit; Marxism is also just materialism. So it appears that from the perspective of socialism, a form of materialism, also there is no place for spirit; only matter can be accepted as real. Besides, the socialists are declared atheists and hence they pose a challenge at least to theistic religion. Pragmatism does not commit itself to any particular ontological position whether materialism or spiritualism. Some pragmatists even recognize with due importance such a thing as religious experience. However, there are other pragmatists who hold that their ideology of social progress is informed by the need or necessity of a classless, casteless society which religion not only failed to achieve so far but there is also no reason to believe that in future religion would be able to achieve it for man. These pragmatists are committed to science in which they pin their hope of social progress and human happiness and they are generally of the view that religion is an obstacle in the way of achieving a progressive egalitarian society. So far members of all the three schools of thought are ardent believers and admirers of science and are strongly committed to human happiness and eradication of social evils. They also generally believe that the *spirit* of science and religion are incompatible. Though not always very clear or explicit, all the three positions seem to imply that religious experience lacks objectivity; religious beliefs and statements do not have any cognitive content. From the point of view of a realist philosophy or realist philosophy of religion this non-cognitivist stance is centrally important. Some may think that non-cognitivist view

of religion has been adumbrated in Kant's separation between science on the one hand and morality and religion on the other. We are inclined to believe that this is most likely an over interpretation of Kant's view in the matter.

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There are many forms of socialism and within any single form all members do not hold exactly the same view. It may be said that this is not very important so far as there is large amount of agreement, at least in the broad outline, in the thinking of and attitudes of Marx, Engels, Lenin and their followers. One point of agreement is that the central concern of the socialist, unlike the followers of scientism, is not truth or theoretical rationality but socio-economical issues of great practical importance such as economic oppression and exploitation of the masses. It has been said that "[P]resent day society is wholly based on exploitation of the vast masses of the working class by a tiny minority of the population , the class of land owners and that of the capitalists.¹⁷²" It has been further claimed that economic oppression is the source of all major (social) evils, sufferings and oppressions including "coarsening and darkening of the spiritual and moral life of masses". Even religion is a form of oppression and it is abetted by the economic oppression. "Religion is one of the forms of spiritual oppression" and "religion is the opium for the people" which the exploiting class administers to make the recipient class get reconciled with their current miserable state and condition on the basis of false hope of a better condition after death.

Both (organized) religion and economics are social institutions. Both seem to make the same promise that happiness will be delivered.

The difference is about time and priority. Lenin believed that really revolutionary struggle was directed against the exploitative capitalism. "Unity in this really revolutionary struggle of the oppressed class for the creation of a paradise on earth is more important to us than unity of proletarian opinion on paradise in heaven." One should not be led to the thinking that socialists believe that religion will deliver the good in the afterlife. That is a fraud used to divert the attention of people of the working class. Promise of religion is false and unscientific. But what exactly is the difference between science and religion? Is it just that science is objective and public and religion subjective and private? It has indeed been said that "Religion must be declared a private affair". But this should not be taken in its face value. For the clarification of Lenin that follows is very important. "We demand that religion be held a private affair so far as the state is concerned. But by no means can we consider religion a private affair so far as our party is concerned". Socialists know the question they will have to face immediately; they themselves raise it, "Why do we not declare in our Programme that we are atheists? Why do we not forbid Christians and other believers in God to join our party?" Pat comes the reply, it is the most prudent move to adopt (and for these communists hardly there is any difference between prudence and morality). Their explanation is that they in their revolutionary struggle should remain focused on the economic problem and the goal of ousting capitalism. So they ignore the differences on religious ground as a matter of policy, lest man's attention may be diverted.

As a policy or propaganda all these may be intelligible but these can hardly stand the test of critical examination of a philosopher or can hardly pass for factual truth of science whether particular or general. Philosophers or any person of scientific temperament is shocked to find that here there is no autonomy of thinking, nor even opportunity of free discussion. In their use of terminology and exercise of discipline, in socialist literature and practice, the socialists make it abundantly clear that hardly there is any scope of free discussion such as we are used to in seminar debates. Their terminology for academic debate and discussion itself is an argument stopper. Open discussion in their literature is "class struggle". Pro-socialist programme is propaganda in the acceptable sense of following party line; but any critique of their position is propaganda in the sense of reactionary response. The term reactionary is not descriptive it is abusive. Something same is true about the use of terms like non-scientific in modernist culture and literature especially those that are produced by the followers of scientism. These are evaluative in certain particular way which goes in favour of the particular position and are otherwise argument stopper.

The predominant concern of socialism is, naturally, the social and in the sphere of the social its predominant concern is economical. Marxism is basically an economic programme; even politics is a means to achieve the economic goal. This is confirmed by the first statement of Lenin we quoted above. We can hardly undertake to discuss here socialists' economic programme or revolutionary policy. But we will briefly take note of their view of the nature and function of philosophy and the way they divide philosophy. We will then find that dialectical

materialism has its own ontology which in its turn is opposed to religion. For this ontology is actually a reductionist materialist ontology and has no place for spirit or Spirit. However we would like to distinguish this part of the thesis of the dialectical materialism of the socialists from Marxism. We do not imply that Marx was more open to religion than Lenin but if Marx is a socialist then socialism need not close the door for religion on the ground that there is no place for free and creative agent as man. But to concede the reality of such a man is to concede the reality of spirit and admit that the spirit of man is not solely governed by the dialectical laws or laws of science that govern the physical phenomena of the world. Such a conception of man is a necessary, though not sufficient, presupposition of both morality and religion and an essential of them.

The question is, is there any place for philosophical consideration and evaluation in socialist order of thinking? We know that Marx said in the eleventh thesis on Feuerbach that philosophies so long only *interpreted* whereas the need was to transform. This is a very perceptive statement even if it is not historically quite correct. If philosophy is the mere class room or seminar hall exercise of ten to five philosophy professionals, of Wittgenstein's description, then indeed its value for man and society is negligible. But at the same time religion more than philosophy has always been a great transforming force primarily in the life of the individual practitioners and also indirectly at least in the life of the whole society. The question that remains is whether the philosophers – their various activities as philosophers – succeeded in transforming or contributing to the transformation of the society, to the

emancipation of the proletariat to be more specific? The appropriate answer seems to be that it was perhaps not what the philosophers or men of religion had in view for one good reason that that was not necessarily the only way of measuring the worth of an institution. Socialists may have a distinct conception of philosophy and distinct criterion of worth of philosophy or religion or whatever. But every system has not been evolved to satisfy those. So all that follows is that *from the socialist point of view* standard mainstream philosophy or religion is not only not an aid but also a hindrance in the path of attaining emancipation – freedom from economic oppression – of the masses. The socialist operates with a sort of instrumentalism. It is said Stalin contributed most to establishing the Marxist-Leninist instrumentalist conception of philosophy. Just as on the instrumentalist view of it science is not so much a body of knowledge or truth as a means of calculation and predication, so also in the view of the socialists philosophical theory is one of man's many instruments to serve society, particularly economically.¹⁷³ Perhaps mainstream philosophy has not been quite successful in this respect but largely because it did not set it as its goal.

Be that as it may, we cannot also deny, as we said before, dialectical materialism even for its founders – Engels, Plekhanov and Lenin – was not “only a method, nor only logic or theory of knowledge, but also ontology. A part at least the central conception of dialectical materialism is that there are certain very general dialectical laws according to which *everything that exists* change and develop.”¹⁷⁴ In such a scheme, as also in the scheme of Laplace, there is no place for

God or of any free and creative conscious agent and hence of man even. This is completely at variance with Marx's naturalistic humanism or of the associated conception of man as having a being which consists in praxis. On this view man is essentially *creative*, a creative a agent; as such he cannot be governed like an unconscious material system by dialectical laws and change and evolve accordingly. So far there may be some possibility of morality and religion within Marx's naturalistic humanism. The hope is not unfounded that we can somehow accommodate both socialism and religion by distinguishing the social from the religious and science from religion. Kantian duality of knowledge and faith may be a way of having both rather than, as scientism contends, denouncing religion. Kant may not accept religion as science but then science need not be the whole of human 'knowledge' or experience nor need it be the only rational thing in the world. There may be different notions of rationality and religion may very well be rational according to some of it. It, therefore, makes sense to spend a few more pages to closely examine Kant's actual position.

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Kant, the celebrated child of Enlightenment, having had Protestant upbringing, was a religious reformer. His insistence on the place of morality in religion is a form of protest against hypocrisy in religious practices of the time. He practically made morality the whole of religion. Though morality in his view is supremely a matter of Reason yet it is out of bounds of knowledge. It is said that as a true child of enlightenment Kant learned to replace tradition and established doctrines by reason and individualism, the two landmarks of the enlightenment mentality.

Kant learned from this movement that reason is the cure of all human ills and guide to all truth. Kant's doctrine of moral autonomy and freedom testifies to the truth of the remark. He believed that "man should recognize no authority in heaven or on earth superior to his own conscience, Kant requires him to make his own moral and religious decisions and work out his own salvation." Historical records, examples of great personalities, relevant institutions, even revelations, may be of some little help "yet all these helps are no more than adventitious, and the strong man will avoid undue reliance upon them, trusting, so far as possible, in himself alone.¹⁷⁵ For irrespective of racial heritage, social environment, or personal traits, the inner voice of reason is always his surest guide; and the fact that his own conscience commands him to be perfect bespeaks a corresponding ability to obey its behest through his own efforts."¹⁷⁶

Our major point of interest is the sharp distinction Kant drew between knowledge and faith in the Introduction to his first Critique. In passing we must remark that though Enlightenment emphasized both reason and individualism, there seems to be some tension between the two. Enlightened individual is not a true individual but a type. For the basic feature of an individual is his conscience or reason and his being guided by it alone. But this reason or this conscience is common to all men, in fact it is universal. This was necessary for preserving objectivity of science and universality of knowledge, in a word, science. To this extent an individual is an anonymous man. This neglect of true individual, subordination of his existence to essence, allegiance to anonymous authority of science, foundationalism, rationality all are

related and all came for later criticism. So far as Kant himself is concerned, in his three critiques and even in his major work on religion, *Religion Within The Limits Of Reason Alone*, which does not have the character of a fourth critique, the individual Kant speaks of is a pseudo individual, a type. Through all these and other writings of him it is Kant, the pseudo individual, who speaks. He is just a rational man and could not find a place for religion in his scheme of things. He reduced religion to morality for which he found a *universal* conscience but for religion he did not get anything comparable. True religion for him is morality; and as distinct from it religion is just mysticism which keeps no place for reason. As a true child of Enlightenment committed to universal reason and (pseudo-) individualism he could not appreciate "true religious devotion" and is known for his "stiff-necked refusal to bow down even before God Himself."¹⁷⁷

In a matter like religion we would like to know what Kant *felt* and thought *as a true individual*, a particular person and not just as a social type. Fortunately Greene has got some relevant information from Kant's friend and biographer Jachmann. We are told that Kant experienced a sort of sense of cosmic mystery while thinking of the vastness and complexity of the universe and human life, essential finitude of man, sublimity of moral law and the like. "Jachmann was able to testify that during all Kant's destruction and construction of proofs of God's existence, and in the presence of every intellectual doubt, he was ever 'convinced in his heart that the world is in the hands of a wise Providence'; that in private conversation with his friends, 'the philosopher and the man spoke out in undeniable testimony to an inner

feeling and a genuine conviction [of God's existence]'; and that 'in the true sense of the word he was a worshipper of God'.”¹⁷⁸ The forces that allocated science to public and religion to private space, also divided the individual into a public type and a private person.

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Let us return to our major concern, and we will see why it is so, the sharp distinction Kant made between faith and knowledge. In spite of such distinction Kant could not avoid, as we have seen, reducing religion to morality. We also know that Kant's idea of knowledge as synthetic a priori judgment helped him to equate knowledge with science. Science and religion are different and they were to be kept different. Scientific knowledge arises from direct contact, so to say, with (scientific) reality. But, as we said, moral law or God is out of bounds of senses. It is only in its technical sense that morality is a matter of faith. Otherwise morality commands greatest acceptability as it comes directly from reason (for sense experience is irrelevant to say the least). Nobody can deny it. The advisability of acting on faith and accepting it¹⁷⁹ do not apply to blind faith. Faith as unsupported belief is not the faith which Kant speaks of when he distinguishes scientific knowledge from moral truths.

In short, when we compare it with the views in the matter of logical positivists and pragmatists, Kant's distinction between knowledge and faith is rather notional. (Same may be true to some extent about the distinction between morality and religion, though for somewhat different reason). Faith is not less trustworthy, less valuable and more harmful than knowledge. Some German and British

philosophers did argue that Kant may be subjected to the criticism that justification Kant gave for restricting the scope of knowledge, for accommodating faith, is not really tenable. And the implication which is normally derived from it is negated by the fact that Kant gave primacy to faith over knowledge in the realm of morality. “[H]e employed the term faith, in this connection, merely to indicate the essential difference between man’s sensuous and his moral intuitions, *without intending to discount the cognitive significance* of the latter. The place of honour to which he assigns moral values in his larger philosophical system would seem to justify such an interpretation. Yet the main tenor of his writings indicates a prior philosophical allegiance to the insight based on reason and sensation alone.” The next remark Greene makes is more important from the point of view of realist philosophy of religion. Greene says “In any case, it is open to us to suggest that Kant could have remained true to his early belief that knowledge can arise only through the first-hand contact with reality, and still have maintained that man achieves such contact preeminently in the moral experience and that, in it, he acquires a vision of *objective reality* at least as worthy of the appellation knowledge as any apprehension of the phenomenal world.”¹⁸⁰

Finally, one should not think that Kant’s distinction between knowledge and faith is in any way responsible for scientism. Why must one admit that no truth claim on the part of a belief or sentence, in any field, can be accepted if it has not been obtained by means accepted in science or if it has not passed the norm of scientific justification? Why can we not say that the personal and private experience of some extraordinary men is the source and justification of all religious beliefs?

Of course the question of our trust in these men will be there. This trust is the same as in case of certain scientific findings obtained by a certain particular scientist or a group of scientists, reported in some reputed journal. In other words we can justify our trust in these men by arguing in a normal scientific way or by normal scientific reasoning. The men in question in the context of religion are simple, truthful, unselfish, kind, intelligent, non- covetous and not bullies, etc. etc. We have enough reason to trust these men and what they say along with their line of reasoning. We therefore accept what they say about natural and public things as also non-natural and private things. So scriptures are not their creation; they have experienced and *discovered* what the scriptures say and convinced themselves about the truth of them. And there are explicitly stated objective procedure following which anyone can obtain the experiences these extraordinary people had. It is on record that many people had successfully tested it. If this is not a *scientific* method or *scientific* rationality, it does not matter; it is rational. And religious utterances need not be devoid of cognitive content.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Science and the Existence of God

The non-simplistic approach to religion should begin by noticing and admitting the fact that just as all or almost all men today align themselves with science and scientific rationality so also they are at the most ambivalent, and not certainly dismissive, in their attitude to religion. Many empirical study and statistical records¹⁸¹ show this to be an undisputed truth. More than this, today many established scientists openly accept not only religion and God but also theism and personal God. Discerning men who value the norm of objectivity have further noted that there is clearly a difference between science and scientism.¹⁸² One crucial difference between the two may be expressed in this way. Science accepts 'religion' even when scientism rejects it. Scientism is a pseudo scientific creed and approach. It contends that science is the whole of human knowledge and experience. Every genuine phenomenon can be explained, every genuine problem can be solved, by science, if not today, tomorrow. The progress of science has not stopped as yet and it is most reasonable to think that it will never stop. At this point it becomes pertinent to ask how to understand or interpret scientism? What does it say about religion? Does it say that the problems religion discusses or the utterances religion makes are not necessarily false or illegitimate though science in its current state of development cannot accept them; that the solutions religion provides to the problems are unacceptable by the standard of science – the only

rational standard of acceptance? Similarly some think that the facts of common belief, practice and experience must be accepted even if science cannot explain them. Scientism adds to it that in some future date science will be able to explain all such facts. There is no explanation other than what science provides. For the present it suffices to say that some eminent philosopher of science and religion have argued that even outside science one can have good scientific explanation.¹⁸³ He has also claimed we have good scientific proof of God's existence in that the acceptance of the God of the theists amounts to providing explanation of such phenomenon as the creation of the universe.

It is said that science accepts religion, to this we need to add that science does not accept (much of) what religion says or teaches. Religion in the sense of certain system of widely held beliefs and widely observed practices is a fact of common experience and science does not deny fact. Nobody except a thoroughgoing mystic¹⁸⁴ or radical skeptic can deny religion as it is described here. Only thing that one can and does reasonably deny is that these beliefs are justified or that these beliefs and practices have some acceptable explanation or that they have the use which they are usually claimed to have. It may be conceded that all other religious beliefs are related directly or indirectly to the belief in the existence of God. (This is so at least in case of theistic religion). This belief ultimately provides the foundation to all other religious beliefs and all religious practices or observance of rituals. Now the question is are we justified in believing that there is God. This is basically a question of proving God's existence.¹⁸⁵ But there is another

aspect of the issue. Do we have any reasonable explanation of the belief? Explanation and justification are not the same thing though they are not unrelated either. We will particularly discuss if we have any good explanation of religion; this partly means good explanation of how and why men came to have religion. We will discuss this question at the end of this work.

How is the question of proving God's existence related to any of the challenges that is to be discussed in this part? Each one of the three major challenges which target religion as such has in the background commitment to science. Scientism is the strongest and at the same time least defensible form of this commitment. Scientism contends that Religion is not possible in the age of science. Whereas science rejects tradition as evidence, religion is largely based on tradition. Like science and rationality, religion and authority go together. A part of what is meant by the impossibility of religion in the age of science is that in this age it is not possible to believe in the existence of God. A discussion of this issue has no essential bearing on there being many different religions or religious traditions. The converse is also true, particularly if we admit as a part of religious diversity some non-theistic religion also. It is also a fact that all forms of theism do not discuss proofs of God with equal importance. This is clear from the extant literature of different forms of theism.

During the last one or two decades many working and established scientists are publicly proclaiming their support to religion.¹⁸⁶ However, the general mood among the majority of scientists is to regard this as the personal position or preference of the scientists in question and not any indication that there has occurred any major change in the long and firmly established view about the relation between science and religion. A very large number of men who are not specialists or who come from different walks of life are pro-religion; they certainly do not reject religion.¹⁸⁷ Since they are equally and firmly of a modern and scientific cast of mind they seem to be in an ambivalent position. For neither they nor anyone else has so far succeeded in reconciling, to the satisfaction of all, science with religion. The legitimacy of the belief in the existence of God of the theists is still an open question. But it would be wrong to ignore this issue or the discussion of it as barren and repetitive. Many new formulations, sophistications, and arguments have been discovered and offered. Both the owners and critics of the belief in God's existence will find it difficult to keep pace with the rapidly growing scholarship in this area.

The oldest effort (which is continuing till today) made from the side of religion to make the belief in question rational or make it look so, took the form of offering rational arguments to prove the existence of God. In Christianity this effort is believed to have started with Anselm much before the birth of modern science. At that time to be rational did not mean to be scientific in the modern sense of the term. It rather

meant satisfying philosophical standard of basing one's belief on sort of Aristotelian logical argument. If one so likes one may suggest that before the emergence of modern science there was the problem of reconciling religion with philosophy. Philosophy from earlier days and science in modern time are both regarded as rational and theoretical enterprises. The latter is also often viewed as an empirical study (where it makes sense). Science rationality equation is a modern European phenomenon. In Hinduism provability or admissibility of God is being fiercely debated from pre-Christian era. In course of this debate many arguments were offered to prove God's existence. There had been almost equal number of refutations of these arguments. Though such efforts can legitimately be viewed as debate on the issue of religion and rationality, they cannot be described historically correctly as science-religion debate. It appears that science-religion debate is a debate within the larger debate known as religion and rationality debate.

We have another reason to choose this subject or debate for discussion. Though modern working philosophy professionals are generally disinclined to treat religion as a subject or core subject of mainstream philosophy yet this is one of the few areas in which philosophy has made significant progress in recent times. One sort of effort in this direction is to be found in the relevant writings of scholars like Malcolm and Plantinga and another type of effort may be found in the works of scholars like Swinburne. Before we conclude this chapter with the contributions of some realist philosophers of classical India we

would examine some of the efforts of Swinburne. But we will begin by stating and examining the views of some other recent writers from the field of philosophy of science.

Major interests of philosophers in theism centre round four important issues: God, creation, natural evil and salvation. First and foremost is the question can we rationally prove the existence of God? Long back Ockham¹⁸⁸ said we could not. But Anselm¹⁸⁹ before him and Descartes¹⁹⁰ after him formulated at least one argument for the existence of God. This argument is known as the ontological argument for the existence of God. Quite early in history philosophers distinguished two positions; one of these is that God's existence cannot be proved, the other position is that God's non-existence can be proved. (Some realist takes the stance that God's existence can be rationally proved).

Since the time of Ockham many people have argued that God's existence cannot be proved but His non-existence can be logically demonstrated. Plantinga in recent times found that at least in some formulation of it the ontological argument for the existence of God may be deemed successful.¹⁹¹ This led to the related question is there any especial form of experience which can be said to be an experience of God? Even an affirmative answer to this question cannot be deemed to solve our first question. For the first question now may be repeated in the new form. Can we rationally accept what is alleged to be an experience of God as what it is claimed to be? Our earlier discussion on

knowledge and faith may be regarded as partial discussion of this problem. The other very old and well known question is how one could reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil. More technical than substantive question to our mind is whether God remains continuously active in the affair of the world even after He creates it. Deists deny it and theists are divided among themselves in the matter. This question is said to be related to the question of dividing religions into natural and revealed. The question that appears to us to be more important than this one is, do we any longer need God to explain the creation of the universe? For science is believed to be capable of explaining the phenomenon in question, and explain it more satisfactorily.¹⁹² The only other related question that we may discuss here is can we consistently interpret all the properties we jointly ascribe to God. For example, can He be eternal or permanent and at the same time omniscient and omnipotent?

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We intend to take up first the question of God's existence. This is not only a well explored area of philosophy of religion but also relevant doctrines and arguments are well known. We should begin by clarifying what is left to be done then. There may be and are many but we will mention only three and of these we will confine ourselves to the third only. We will not discuss the position which in its formulation involves the new jargon "conversation stopper".¹⁹³ Religion to our mind is much more than a mere conversion stopper. The second task, crucially related

to the third, is to clarify the idea of a non-theistic religion and examine the viability of dividing religions into theistic and non-theistic religion. For non-theistic religion the question of proving the existence of God does not arise. But for understandable reason followers of non-theistic religion are found to be very keen on refuting proofs of God which are offered from the side of theistic religion. Non-theists may remain satisfied with criticizing the proofs of God the theists offer. They may also proceed to offer arguments to disprove God's existence. It is an interesting matter to study if there is any fundamental difference between non-theists' way of disproving God and the way of the nonbeliever scientists. But we will confine ourselves mainly to the third task of noting and examining some recent discussions of the question of God's existence.

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Man has religious beliefs; it is an evident fact. It may also be evident that it is not necessary for man to have such beliefs. The question that has been troubling men for centuries is how men came to have these beliefs; what is the explanation why some men have beliefs like belief in God. The other question is : Does man have reason to hold religious beliefs or is it that the explanation of his having these beliefs lies only in such factors as ignorance, superstition, indoctrination and so on? In this section we will be concerned only with the question of reason for having religious beliefs and the only religious belief we will discuss is belief in (personal) God which is also sometimes called theistic belief. If it is rational for a man to believe in the existence of God then it

should be possible for that man or someone else to offer, in principle or on demand, proofs for God. As a matter of fact many arguments have been offered in the past to prove God's existence. Arguments or considerations were also offered to disprove God. We are interested in examining if and what advances philosophy has made in this area. Contrary to the common belief, philosophy is constantly making progress in many fields and philosophy of religion is no exception. That these modern advances have been made is most likely to be already known to many in a general way. Still this discussion of some of the advances may serve the purpose of a new take off ground for launching projects for further advance. Though otherwise it is a problem of philosophy of religion, which discusses religion in general, and not specifically a problem of comparative religion, yet there is some special justification for discussing the proofs of God here. In the mainstream philosophy, discussion of proofs of God's existence is confined as a rule to the discussion of the proofs offered from the point of view of Christian theology. We do not find much discussion of proofs that belong specifically to any one of the other two Semitic religions. It is also not generally known if and what significant contributions in this field was made by Judaism or Islam or whether they are comparable to the contributions of the Hindus or the Christians. The extant literature of comparative religion is quite disappointing in this respect. However, we do not just want to reproduce these arguments from extant standard text of Hindu philosophy. The discussions we will note and examine to illustrate the recent advances made in the discussion of the old problem

of God's existence involve reference to say the logic of negative existential, theory of creation in astrophysics and so on.

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Since a number of proofs are already available for a long time and there are controversies about their formulation as well as validity one should seek the root or roots of the problem of understanding. The problems of understanding in question may relate to the conception of proof itself or the conception of God or both. For no proof of God can be given or be judged successful except with reference to certain particular conception of God. Sometimes it may not be explicit. It is one of the businesses of philosophical inquiry to make that explicit and clear. Again given a certain conception of God which proof can be accepted as proof of (such) God or successful proof of God depends on what we understand by proof or by successful proof. For example, it is often said that no *scientific* proof for the existence of God is available or can be given. What is understood (or should be understood) by scientific proof needs clarification. For the idea of proof is much older than the separation of science and religion or emergence of modern science. Explicit or implicit reference to these is, however, involved in the very conception of scientific proof and its distinction from non-scientific 'proof'. Some think that only the votaries of scientism equate proof with scientific proof and that we must be careful to keep science and scientism quite distinct. What is more important and is a new development is that some scholars forcefully argue that scientific

argument and explanation can be and are available outside science, particularly in philosophical theology.

It is generally believed that a rational man can firmly believe in God¹⁹⁴ if some flawless proof is available in His favour. Such a man can accept the *possibility* of God, but not His actual existence, it may be said, till it is shown further that nobody *can* disprove God. It will not be rational to accept even the possibility of God simply because nobody has, *as a matter of fact*, succeeded disproving him. For this may be due to the deficiencies or insufficient exertion on the part of who tried to disprove Him. What is needed is either conclusive proof or conclusive disproof. Some among those who knowingly or unknowingly take proof in the sense of scientific proof, may hold that there is no scientific proof which can prove the existence of God. Others maintain that science can prove that God does not exist. Such a challenge is usually made by using the resources of the logic of negative existential. Quine¹⁹⁵ for example has noted that in a dispute over existence one that holds the negative position, the opponent, is always at a disadvantage compared to the person who holds the positive thesis. But we will here present the position of one who thinks that we cannot rely much upon the known problem of negative existential or use it in favour of theism and argue that it is not possible to disprove the existence of God, that is, prove that God does not exist. We will soon refer to one who has actually stated this argument of the theists and then refuted it. When we do so and examine his refutation it will be clear why we insisted above that

there is need for drawing the distinction between the proof (disproof) of a thing and the conception of it.

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Professor Schick Jr. argues in this way. "No one can prove an unrestricted negative" is the reply usually given to those who claim that science can prove that God does not exist. An unrestricted negative is a claim to the effect that something doesn't exist anywhere. Since no one can exhaustively examine every place in the universe, the reply goes, no one can conclusively establish the nonexistence of anything.¹⁹⁶ Any discerning student of philosophy will be dismayed to find that the first and the single sentence quoted above testifies to the truth that Professor Schick is a victim of confusions quite unbecoming of a philosophy professor.¹⁹⁷ The argument he offers or the formulation of it by him is flawed; and this inclines us to suspect that he is suffering from some confusion. We will return to these critical comments later. Let us follow the argument as he has given it. He thinks that this defence of the theists — that to disprove God's existence one needs to assert an unrestricted negative which however cannot be done or at least proved — will not work. He has two sorts of argument to offer, first a logical argument and the second an argument from fact. His logical argument is that the theists' argument that no one can prove an unrestricted negative is itself an unrestricted negative. And since according to the theist it cannot be proved, its opposite has to be accepted that unrestricted negative can be "logically" proved. Schick backs up this argument with facts. He claims that in philosophical literature many

examples are found where unrestricted negatives have been refuted. He suggests on the supposed authority of Parmenides that Logical contradiction does not exist. Let us for the time being accept that it is an example of negative existential and, according to Schick unrestricted negative. What lesson Schick derives from this is that “one way to prove a universal negative is to show that the *notion* of a thing is inconsistent.”¹⁹⁸ It seems that Schick now confuses a number of things and think that all the following three things are the same: proving a negative existential, proving an unrestricted negative and proving the inconsistency of a notion. He says, “To prove that God does not *exist*, then, one *only* has to demonstrate that the concept of God is inconsistent”¹⁹⁹. It is true that no argument can prove a self-contradictory *proposition*. For, an argument with a self-contradictory proposition as conclusion must be invalid if its premises are true. Let us admit, as Schick maintains, that an argument can be invalid also in other ways. It is held (rather inconsistently) that no valid argument can prove an inconsistent idea, and one that does is not valid. But for an argument to be invalid it is not necessary, though it is sufficient, that the idea should be inconsistent. It is possible to disprove God by showing that the very idea is inconsistent, but it is not the same thing as proving that God does not exist. But before we come back to it let us conclude Schick’s argument. He finds that the theistic conception of God is inconsistent. He does not note that there is no *the* theistic conception of God. But Schick is right that all theists admit God to be a supreme being. He then shows that just as the notion of supreme number is inconsistent

so also the notion of supreme god is inconsistent. He does not consider that what is true of the adjective of supremacy when added to number may not be so when it is added to (the notion of) being. For, by definition a number must have a successor and that the successor of a number is, again by definition (or it is just an axiom of the system of mathematics), another number. From this it follows that there cannot be a highest or last or, in this sense, a supreme number. But there is nothing in the notion of being to show that every being must have another being which is greater or superior to it. Secondly for a realist there is a distinction between a thing and the idea or concept of it. One's conception of a valid argument may not be correct and needs revision but that does not prove that there is not or cannot be a valid argument (according to some different and correct conception of it). Existence of a thing does not depend on our ability to prove it. What depends on such ability is our right to claim that we know that it is (or what it is). If it were not so then we could never prove that a certain descriptive concept is not correct and needs revision. Inconsistency of an idea proves our corresponding belief to be false. But a realist cannot argue the non-existence of a thing from the falsity of the belief about it. That an idea is inconsistent may be due to our failure but there may be no fault on the part of the thing itself. If however a purported thing is such that every conception of it must necessarily be inconsistent then that may prove the non-existence of the thing. Instances of such thing can more easily be found in case of theoretical entity, such as number. It follows from the concept of number itself that there cannot be a last

number. Non-existence of a last and (in this sense) supreme number follows from the inconsistency of the concept of supreme number itself because it is a theoretical entity (not for the realist though).

God according to the theists or realists is not a theoretical entity and further there is no *the* concept of God. A celebrated Hindu realist arrived at just the opposite conclusion. He said that everyone accepts God, though according to his own conception. Even the Cārvāka philosophers are no exception. So any proof or disproof of God is relative to a certain particular conception of it. It is in this context that a realist can still say that it is not possible to prove an unrestricted negative. It will be more appropriate to say that in such negative sentences the concept of the thing being sought to be disproved is left undetermined. Thus it makes no sense to say "x exists" or "x does not exist". We can say at the most that under such and such description the thing in question, number or God or whatever, is or is not; its existence is proved or disproved.

We further note that Schick seems to be confused about the distinction between unrestricted negative and negative existential. Nothing or no one is perfect may be an example of unrestricted negative, in the sense of Schick. But it is not a case of negative existential. If, however, to disprove God or to prove that God does not exist we are required to prove the relevant negative existential then that is not possible. When in logic or philosophy or more accurately in philosophical logic, we say that it is not possible to prove or even assert a negative existential we mean either that such a statement is

self-contradictory or that the apparatus of standard formal logic is not adequate to deal with such statements, the logic of such statement is unclear. At the most one can say logic can tackle the problem of negative existential only if we are prepared to pay a very heavy price. The price is that we will have to forego the formal character of logic itself. So if one insists we will revise our statement and say that we cannot prove in formal logic a negative existential and hence we cannot prove that God does not exist. Whether it is a deficiency of logic or not is a different question. Finally then there is (so far at least) no deductive proof for the non-existence of God; rather it is possible to argue that there is deductive proof for the existence of God. We can still doubt or deny that such a God can be supreme, omniscient or the like. But we cannot disprove His existence if disproving means finding (formal) deductive argument to prove the proposition that God does not exist.

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We may consider briefly if there is inductive argument to prove or disprove the existence of God. Before that and independent of what we said in response to Schick's thesis, we would like to add that in philosophy we normally understand by deductively proving the existence of God, proving his existence from the conception of Him. Ontological argument is perhaps the best example of proving the existence of God deductively. Such argument is necessary and a priori. Swinburne thinks that the standard deductive arguments such as the ontological arguments of Anselm and Descartes are either "invalid or (more usually) their premises are highly dubious." What he says about

the premises is irrelevant when we are talking about formal deductive argument. But his characterization of deductive arguments for the existence of God as *a priori* argument, argument from premises that are *a priori* is generally correct. He says “*A priori* arguments to the existence of God begin from ... some truth about what God have to be like, if he existed; and they then go on to claim that it follows that he must exist.” What is known as ontological argument for God’s existence is of this sort.

Now we turn to if there are correct inductive arguments to prove the existence of God. Such arguments are there and are quite familiar. But we owe to some recent writings of Professor Swinburne²⁰⁰ for explicitly categorizing and describing these arguments as inductive and exposing or formulating their inductive character in detail. Before we turn to them it may be remarked that some of the arguments of the realist Hindu theist is difficult to classify along this line. People may be tempted to take some of the arguments of the Naiyāyika as inductive, but on analysis it will be found that the case is otherwise.

Swinburne thinks that the familiar cosmological and teleological arguments are examples of inductive argument in question. By way of sort of reiterating the generally accepted view Swinburne says that in a ‘correct’ inductive argument the “premises in some degree probabilify the conclusion, but do not necessitate it.” He then divides correct inductive argument into *P*-inductive and *C*-inductive on the ground that a correct *P*-Inductive argument makes the conclusion “more probable than not”; in a correct *C*-inductive argument, the premises add to the

probability of the conclusion (i.e.) confirm it, make it more probable than it was; but do not necessarily make it overall probable". It is generally true that an argument shows one that the conclusion is true if only one knows or assumes that the premises are true. Swinburne thinks that the premises of the cosmological and teleological arguments are such that with respect to them "there is no doubt that the premises are true."²⁰¹

Cosmological and teleological arguments proceed in an a posteriori way. These arguments begin with some evident observable facts of experience – such as the existence of the world or almost perfect order in the world – and then proceed to argue that God's action explains the occurrence of the phenomenon [in question] and so He *must*²⁰² exist.

Inductive arguments have two advantages. On the one hand they seem to correctly represent how a vast number of ordinary men think about the matter in question and came to believe in the existence of God. On the other hand, the procedure or the thinking is quite in the scientific line. In (natural) sciences we begin with certain observed data and frame a certain hypothesis to explain them. If it succeeds in explaining them satisfactorily the hypothesis becomes a plausible one and likely to be true. If the hypothesis passes the further tests to which hypotheses are subjected it becomes a proved general truth or law. If philosophical arguments for the existence of God, or some of them, can be shown to be correct C-inductive argument then they could be and should be regarded as good as scientific argument or exemplifying

scientific procedure. The God-hypothesis²⁰³ will now become a scientific hypothesis. The gap between science and religion or faith and reason will be bridged to a great extent. But Swinburne is in favour of exercising great caution here. He is quite confident that the inductive arguments, like the cosmological and teleological argument, at least as he has formulated and explained them, provide good and scientific explanations of the concerned phenomenon. But he does not deny that religion is still not science though good scientific argument is found in it. For he claims to have shown good scientific argument is available outside science also.

Some may think it natural at this point to come to the conclusion that there is no fundamental difference between the philosophical and scientific arguments for the existence of God; the cosmological and teleological arguments at least, share the pattern of scientific (inductive) argument. If now the conclusion provides scientifically good and correct explanation why should we not call these philosophical theories scientific theories and philosophical explanations scientific explanations?"²⁰⁴ Swinburne in any case thinks that a good and correct philosophical argument or explanation is scientific but not science. One may think that this position is not fundamentally different from that of Treat who, while criticizes Schick, thinks that science cannot prove God's existence rather it disproves it. What do we then gain in Swinburne? Swinburne makes a heroic attempt to justify our belief in God and makes it acceptable to scientists as best as possible without giving up or changing the current conception of science.

It is important to note that the central point of Schick has been that science not only does not admit God it disproves it. Science, in his opinion, can successfully disprove God. But there are other people who are not convinced by the argument of Schick but are strongly atheist. This shows that within science and among the scientifically oriented scholars there are many differences in detail. Treat, for example, comes to the conclusion after detailed examination of Schick's arguments, that "The God axiom Can't be disproven." However, he agrees with Schick that God does not exist. He says first "The God axiom doesn't belong in [sic] scientific theory precisely because it can't be disproven."²⁰⁵ Treat, next expresses his apprehension "What if it [God axiom] is true?" Such a possibility alarms him; "It would make meaningless what we call science". But it actually shifts the question. It assumes that science is meaningful and whatever tends to make it meaningless has to be rejected. But one might argue that science would be meaningless if it cannot accommodate, if not God, at least religion? Treat loses interest or energy to pursue it further but he concludes with a candid expression of a very personal emotion – emotion in favour of atheism – mixed up or messed up with an argument. He writes "Atheists are not, after all, ruled by reason. Logic doesn't give one a reason to get up in the morning. We have feeling, such as pride, dignity, and then love of figuring things out. However logical we wish to appear, the reason we're willing to argue the question is that life based on the God axiom (like theory that includes it) is not *useful* to us."²⁰⁶ We will not argue whether Treat has the right to represent us (without our consent). Perhaps what he means

by "us" is Schick's 90% scientists.²⁰⁷ This is a minor point. Let us admit that Treat is not out to proving that God does not exist. He is interested in showing that there is *scientific* ground to show that there is no God; that science disproves God. But what he ultimately finds reasonable to say is that science has no *need* to admit it. The question is not one of fact or proving God as a fact but proving god as a necessary explanatory principle. And science finds no explanatory power in the God-principle or God hypothesis. Or more accurately science does not find any need to admit God as an explanatory principle since science can explain, without admitting God or the principle resorted to by the theists, all that the God principle is supposed to explain. We need to note that that there is a gap between lack of necessity and lack of reality. To say that something is unnecessary or useless is not to say that it is unreal or does not exist. However, there is one context in which, either the gap is not there or it is not so important. The context in question is that of theoretical entity. We admit a theoretical entity not because we have any independent evidence or proof of it but because it enables us to explain certain phenomenon which has no known explanation without it. Schick actually says "God is a theoretical entity that is postulated by theists to explain various phenomena, such as the origin of the universe, the design of the universe, and the origin of living things. Modern science, however, can explain all of these phenomena without postulating the existence of God."²⁰⁸ Once we find about such an alleged theoretical entity that it is not needed to explain anything or at least to explain the things it is supposed to explain, we can conclude

that the thing in question does not exist. Laplace indeed said, science (that is his own system) does not need the God-hypothesis.

We would like to comment first that it is false and anachronistic to say that according to the theists God is a theoretical entity. Unknowingly Schick commits himself to the wrong generalization that whatever has explanatory power is a theoretical entity. Rain is not a theoretical entity, but it explains why seeds sprout. Even so it still remains true that science does not or perhaps cannot prove the existence of God. Why this is so important? It may be said that the implication is that belief in God is not rational. It is questionable whether such implication is there or not. But suppose, let us accept for the moment, this is the implication. If atheists need not be ruled by reason, as Treat says, why a theist needs must be so ruled? A theist can go to the extent of saying if there is no God one has to invent one. It is not just a theoretical question it is so to say an existential necessity.²⁰⁹

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Let us return to the position of Swinburne. It is a position between the position of an atheist scientists on the one hand and that of a believing theist on the other. He thinks we have argument and explanation to prove God's existence and they are as good as a correct scientific reason or explanation. But it is still *like* a good argument of science but not science. On this point he comes very close to Schick but not close to Treat. The argument of Schick is that God-hypothesis lacks the merits of good and acceptable scientific hypothesis, Treat completely disagrees though. We would end this section by first stating

what seems to be the final position in the matter of an expert in philosophy of religion like Swinburne and then recording our review of it.

At one point Swinburne completely reverses the position of the scientists as represented by Schick. The latter seems to believe both that God-hypothesis or theistic belief in God is not needed to explain anything (or anything scientists are interested in explaining) and that it cannot explain anything, let alone the existence of the universe. Swinburne, on the other hand, says "there cannot be a scientific explanation of the existence of the universe".²¹⁰ "The existence of the universe is something evidently inexplicable by science."²¹¹ Interesting point to note is that Schick and Swinburne – a scientist and a philosopher (of science) – arrive at these opposite conclusions from a certain agreed position, it is their view about the nature of scientific explanation or more accurately explanation in science. They both agree that scientific explanation is natural – it is in terms of natural phenomena whereas theistic explanation in terms of God is in terms of supernatural entity or principle. Schick now argues from "inherent inferiority of supernatural explanations"²¹², (which he had tried to prove before, rather unsuccessfully if we accept arguments and explanations of Treat), that we cannot accept explanation in terms of God even if no scientific or natural explanation of phenomenon like the origin of the universe is available at the moment. He could have argued that we could not accept any alleged explanation as an explanation just because no good, that is, scientific explanation is in principle available. He came close to saying just this when he referred to a passage of Plato's

Dialogue *Cratylus*. Schick here credited Plato with the realization that to say that God did something is not to explain anything, but simply to offer an excuse for not having an explanation. The argument he actually gives is what James called argument from ignorance. We may not have at the moment a good explanation in terms of natural phenomena but in future we can find one. Progress of knowledge has not stopped as yet and is unlikely to stop ever. Schick finally writes "What if there was no plausible natural explanation for some phenomena? Would that justify the claim that god caused it? No, for our inability to provide a natural explanation may simply be due to our ignorance of the operative natural forces. Many phenomena that were once attributed to supernatural beings ... can now be explained in purely natural terms." "... theists would be justified in offering a supernatural explanation for a phenomenon only if they could prove that it is in principle impossible to provide a natural explanation of it. In other words to undermine the scientific proof for the nonexistence of God, theists have to prove an unrestricted negative, namely, that no natural explanation of a phenomenon will be found. And that, I believe, is an unrestricted negative that no theist will ever be able to prove."²¹³

Swinburne construes cosmological and teleological arguments for God as inductive arguments and claims in favour of such arguments that "Arguments of this type, unlike *a priori* arguments, do, I believe, attempt to codify in a rigorous form the vague reasons which many ordinary believers have for believing in God."²¹⁴ What he calls P-Inductive argument "is one which is much used in science, history, and all other fields of human inquiry."²¹⁵ "Scientists use this pattern of

argument to argue to the existence of unobservable entities as causes of the phenomena which they observe.”²¹⁶ Swinburne does not seem to deny the distinction of arguments into scientific natural and theistic supernatural. But he finds it more useful to distinguish, nearly the same arguments or, better, explanations in a different way. He distinguishes scientific explanation from what he calls “personal explanation”. Theistic arguments for God, at least the cosmological and teleological argument, as he construes them, are examples of personal explanation. He also states criteria for deciding in case of each type of explanation if the explanation provided is a good one. He then writes “[I]n seeking the best explanation of phenomena we may seek explanations of either kind, and if we cannot find a scientific one which satisfies the criteria, we should look for a personal one.”²¹⁷ “Scientific explanation involves laws of nature and previous states of affairs. Personal explanation involves persons and purposes.”

Let us consider the cosmological argument against this background and following Swinburne. The fact to be explained is the existence of the universe. It is the premise of the inductive argument in question. Among the features of this fact or the universe are included its exceeding complexity, finitude and particularity. Part of its complexity is that it contains so much of matter. It is to be noted that “Matter is inert and has no power which it can choose to exert; it does what it has to do”.²¹⁸ Such a complex universe is to be explained in terms of something simpler. Let us try to explain it scientifically. Science explains one state of affair in terms of a previous state of affair in conjunction with some law of nature which determines the previous sort of states of affair to

bring about the successive sort of state of affair. A typical explanation would be the explanation of the universe today in terms of the existence of the universe yesterday. We can explain the given position of a physical system provided we know its earlier position and the law which precisely governs the changes in position of physical systems whether it is a ball or a planet or a galaxy. Such scientific explanations are limited. Given states of affairs, matter, natural laws, etc. science can explain one state of affair or position of one matter in terms of certain previous state of affair or previous position of the matter concerned just because they obey or are governed by the laws in question that are there. Now we can ask questions like "Why there are natural laws and physical things at all." "[T]here might so easily not have been a universe at all, ever. Or the Universe might so easily have been a chaotic mess. That there is an orderly universe is something very striking, yet beyond the capacity of science to ever explain."²¹⁹ Swinburne goes further and says that this inability of science is necessary and not contingent. We cannot say that when it develops further in future science would be able to explain these.²²⁰ This is exactly the opposite of what Schick said. It is fair to note that Swinburne has not given any convincing explanation or justification why he believes that science cannot in principle explain these phenomena. But it is not very difficult to find them out either. Anyway, the conclusion Swinburne arrives at is the following and it is just the opposite of that of Treat. Swinburne says "Since there cannot be a scientific explanation of the existence of the universe, either there is a personal explanation or there is no explanation at all."²²¹ The person in question is God and Swinburne confidently says "But a God can provide

an explanation. The hypothesis of theism is that the Universe exists because there is a god who keeps it in being and that laws of nature operate because there is a god who brings it about that they do". We will speak more about what this personhood means when we discuss an Indian version of the cosmological argument for God. We would stop this exposition for the present with one more sentence of Swinburne. "The hypothesis that there is a god is the hypothesis of the existence of the simplest kind of person which there could be."

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Going carefully through the views of Swinburne it seems that he has taken a project of effecting a sort of compromise. He goes by the view of some scientists and scientism that the distinction between science and religion is final. He also seems to accept that to be rational is to be scientific; science is the best example of what rationality is. Now if a modern man is to believe religion on his own terms and conditions he would ask how to make religious belief rational. Swinburne shows that there are some standard criteria of good scientific explanation and (inductive) argument. He knows that no scientist will resort to such factors as desire, purpose, choice, will etc. for constructing his explanation or argument. And a theist does just this when he explains the origin of the universe in terms of divine agency. So far theist's explanation cannot be regarded as science. Swinburne admits this much and this will gladden the scientists and the followers of scientism. What he does next, much to the satisfaction of the theists, is that he argues that theistic argument is the best possible argument, where scientific

argument is not or cannot be available, in terms of the criteria of good scientific argument itself. Except for appealing to a conscious agent theistic argument has all the qualities of a good scientific inductive argument. So even if theism is no science it is perfectly scientific and hence rational. This is the best that can be done by way of showing that our religious beliefs are rational.

One may say that we have not still solved our old problem, how to show religion or religious beliefs to be rational. We have only made some definite advance towards such solution. Now the question needs reformulation. Religion is rational if Swinburne's views and claims are accepted. We are to postpone our judgment on the question whether it is rational to believe in God till we examine and find that Swinburne's views are acceptable. Points to decide are (i) what compelling reason is there in favour of Swinburne's claim that God is the simplest person and hence God-hypothesis satisfy the simplicity criterion – one of the criteria of good scientific hypothesis and explanation. (ii) Inductive conclusion and hypothesis are not the same. (iii) Proving something as an explanatory principle is not enough, we may need to prove something as a fact. Even if Swinburne succeeds it will show that God-hypothesis is a good, scientifically good, *hypothesis*. It will then be proved that God is a good explanatory *principle*. However proving God means, so far at least the theists are concerned, proving God as a fact. A fact is a fact even independent of its having or not having explanatory or theoretical value. (iv) Swinburne conveniently omits the scientist's criterion that a natural phenomenon must be explained in terms of some other natural

phenomenon and not in terms of some supernatural phenomenon. So the explanation of the universe in terms of God who is supernatural cannot be regarded as scientific, let alone good scientific explanation.

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We now turn in succession to two necessary tasks: (A) Examination of the arguments of Swinburne and (B) Stating and critically examining the arguments of some Indian realists. From our point of view the fact of the matter is that science is limited. Its limitation leaves some areas to be investigated by other disciplines. But it is simply assumed that in these other areas or disciplines the nature and sense of explanation and argument must be exactly what they are in science. Why this has to be so? Religion is rational because it is internally coherent and can answer satisfactorily the questions that arise within religion; we formulate both questions and answers using religious concepts and with reference to religious doctrines. For example, we know the question arises how to reconcile God being all loving and there being natural evil. Different explanations within religion are given but the explanation that is accepted is still religious explanation, explanation within religion. To cite one instance, apart from moral evil there is the problem of what is called natural evil. Plantinga makes the point that it is possible to think that both kinds of evil can be explained in terms of free will. He suggests that natural evil may be brought about by free creatures like Satan and his cohorts²²² and not by God or man. Though he traces this explanation to some ancient tradition (St. Augustine) and sort of admits its formal compatibility with scientific

natural law explanation Swinburne does not accept this explanation. He says, "I suggest that the unified nature of the natural laws which govern the Universe makes it most improbable that one free agent or group thereof is responsible for those laws which bring about natural evil; and another agent or group thereof is responsible for all other laws." Be that as it may, we cannot deny that the explanation Plantinga refers to, the explanation of St. Augustine, is an explanation within religion and may also be deemed to be consistent.

What we need to keep in mind is that Swinburne is by and large faithful to the modern European cultural orientation. So it seems that he in conformity to the monolithic modern European cultural perspective takes rationality to have just one sense, the sense it has in science, wherever and whenever it may manifest itself. Scientists as well as humanist intellectuals of Europe are equally sensitive to the distinction between science and pseudo science. Against this background best that Swinburne could do to defend theological belief in the existence of God was to show and claim that the teleological and cosmological proofs of God had all the qualities of a good scientific argument adding at the same time that religion was still not science. But this may not satisfy his friends who are committed to modern European culture and its values. They would first point out that there is a lurking danger in Swinburne's explanation. It seems to imply that science and religion belong to one single system of knowledge or theory, almost obliterating thereby the distinction between science and pseudo-science. Or, it is the related second point, his explanation must be judged to be flawed on one

crucial point, it violates one important criterion of scientific rational explanation that it must be limited. Let us explain the two points briefly.

One can hardly expect a theologian to accept as a piece of good religious explanation the explanation that shows how God came to create the universe in terms of laws of natural science. Similarly if one explains the creation and complexity of the universe in terms of the desire etc. of a supernatural being then there is little prospect of scientists accepting this explanation as a scientifically good (personal) explanation. Any good scientific explanation is limited in two senses. In the formal sense such explanation is limited in that it begins by accepting certain things as unexplained (except in the sense of having explanation in use). Scientific explanation cannot go beyond this limit. Everything else is explained ultimately in terms of the unexplained things. If one violates this formal limitation then there arises the danger of making the explanation circular. However the unexplained terms are not necessarily unexplainable. They are unexplained in a system specific way. The same terms may be among the explained and explainable terms of another system which would have its own set of different unexplained terms. If we agree to keep our explanation non-circular then we need to keep it open. It would be possible to pushing the explanation further or to revise the explanation already obtained.

A good scientific explanation is also materially limited. It is always limited to a certain well defined domain. Within a given domain, say natural order of things, (natural) science explains certain natural phenomenon in terms of certain other natural phenomenon or group of

such phenomena. The explanans and the explanandum of scientific explanation belong to the same domain and together constitute one single order. This is the correct way of looking at the practice of scientists' explanation of one natural phenomenon in terms of another natural phenomenon. If certain observed phenomenon of the macro world can be explained in terms of certain elements and laws of the micro world then our earlier conception of the natural order of things – the Newtonian world – gets enlarged or deepened. Within this enlarged picture of the world or the natural world we now have both the macro world and the micro world. What follows from this accepted nature and view of scientific explanation is that if we are permitted to explain certain natural phenomenon like the existence or complexity of the world in terms of knowledge, desire etc. of God then we are compelled to admit the two orders – the natural and the supernatural (divine) – to form parts of one single larger order. There is little chance that either the European Christian theologian (excepting perhaps the pan-theists) or modern European scientists would accept this. What sort of order would it be? It would be a larger order but hardly a single order, for the elements are quite disparate. Apart from other points what may count against Swinburne's discussion of proofs for the existence of God and his claim that good scientific explanation and proof may be found in cosmological and teleological proof of God is that it is unjustified to claim both that the explanation under consideration is scientific and that the explanans belongs to an order different from the order to which the explanandum belongs. It is a different question, to which we

may revert later, if and what independent ground is there for holding that there is a fixed and permanent distinction between the natural order and divine order or even material order and mental order.²²³

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We need to discuss briefly two other points. Swinburne thinks that science in principle cannot explain the origin of the universe or its complexity but religion or philosophy of religion can offer scientifically good argument for these phenomena. It cannot be unknown to him that in today's scientific cosmology or astro-physics serious attempt is being made to explain the origin of the universe. The search is very much on for an explanation of the phenomenon within science and that too without changing the current conception of science either. Stephen Hawking has explicitly said within which limit and under which condition – or in which sense – this science can admit God as the creator of the universe. Secondly, the thesis of the Christian theology that God is the creator of the Universe makes reference not only to God's omniscience and omnipotence but also to His relation to time. Keeping all these points in view we have discussed elsewhere²²⁴ the question of consistency of Christian theology. This is a huge problem and we hardly have space for discussing it here. Instead we want to briefly present the view of some Indian theists who were also realist philosophers. The school to which these philosophers belong is Nyāya which is one of the major realist schools of Indian philosophy. This school has a long history; arguably dating back from pre-Christian era it is still alive and healthy,

even if it is no longer as healthy as it was even one hundred years before.

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Some Indian scholars in recent time have said that Nyāya philosophy was originally atheist (or at least agnostic); later on vested interest – Brāhmaṇ-s or the priests among them – turned it into a theistic system of philosophy. Rarely serious Indian philosophers thought that this view of a self styled historian of Indian philosophy deserved any serious consideration. We do not hold a different opinion even though we had to review this book or part of it.²²⁵ This author, who was known for his atheism and left leanings, and also a few others after him, made much of the fact that there had been in India schools of both atheist thinkers known as Cārvāka and non-theistic religion such as Buddhism which mounted strong opposition against the Hindus – their religion and belief in personal God, and ultimately on the authority of the Veda or the Scripture of the Hindus. But none of these schools produced any systematic study of proofs for the existence of God or proofs of His non-existence. Even in the school of theistic Semitic group of three major religions only the Christians produced any considerable literature dealing with the problem and proof of the existence of God. The Nyāya school of Indian realism supports a certain form of theism and produced large literature on this subject. This was also necessary for the philosophers of this school; for on the one hand their overall approach in philosophy has always been rational and analytic and on the other hand they found it necessary to refer to God for explaining not only the

existence and complexity of the universe but also matters like the meaningfulness of language and man's ability to learn it.

The literature of Nyāya and its sister system Vaiśeṣika consists of large number of works of different kinds including commentarial literature on some earlier work. The first commentary in the tradition of Nyāya was written by Vātsyāyana to explain the book of aphorism by Gautama known as Nyāyasūtra or Nyāyadarśana. Older commentaries of the Vaiśeṣika system were on the book of aphorism by Kaṇāda known as Vaiśeṣika Sūtra. The early commentaries on Vaiśeṣika sūtra are however not extant. Much *direct* discussion on God is not found in these sūtra texts and this is to be expected. Sūtra texts are meant to be extremely brief. But from the time of the first commentary on the Nyāyasūtra much has been written by the writers of the Nyāya (and Vaiśeṣika) school on God and proofs of God. In the literature of advanced (Navya) Nyāya also extensive discussions on the subject is available and these are extremely subtle and sophisticated. In a book of the present kind any detailed discussion of these subtle contributions is uncalled for. We will only briefly indicate the Nyāya views on two related points namely, proof of existence of God and some of the properties which the theists in different cultures ascribe to God. One of the ways in which these two are related is this. Whoever proves or disproves God proves or disproves God as he understands it, according to his own conception of God or under certain particular description under which he takes or discusses God. Thus for proving or disproving Him we take God under this or that description, ascribe this or that

property to Him. Even so we need to distinguish these two points to emphasize the need to discuss separately if we can consistently ascribe all the properties we ascribe to God consistently. Some have found that unless further clarified it may be found that the joint ascription to God, by the Christians, of the two properties of being omniscient and being the creator of the universe is inconsistent. But the same inconsistency is not found when a Naiyāyika ascribes the same two properties to God. A careful analysis would show that the Christians and the Hindus do not understand the same thing when they speak of divine properties like omniscience, cosmic agency, all kindness and so on. Incidentally the detailed analysis we find in Nyāya of the concept of agency (*kartṛtva*) we ascribe to God is unavailable elsewhere. Whoever has read the Nyāya analysis of this concept will be struck by the depth and reach of their analytical and rational approach.

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We would like to begin our brief story of the Nyāya theistic argument for the existence of God, historically speaking, rather at the middle with the account of Udayanācārya. He is one of the greatest among the Naiyāyika-s of all time. But he cannot be placed in the age of the earlier Nyāya or in the age of the modern Nyāya. He emerged what is known as the borderline of these two periods of the history of Nyāya. We will refer here to only one work of Udayanācārya, *Nyāya-kusumāñjali*, which is devoted to the discussion of the single topic, God. The book masterly expounds and defends Nyāya theistic view. At the beginning of the last chapter (sthavaka) of the book he offered eight

(plus at least one and hence nine) arguments to prove the existence of God. It is to be noted that in the book Udayanācārya critically expounds the Nyāya theism; in the process he found it necessary to make reference to the views of some other schools of Indian philosophy. In the very first chapter he suggested what may be called cosmological argument for the existence of God. We like to draw the attention of the scholars to a single remarkable statement with which Udayanācārya begins his account of this argument. Incidentally, this statement may be understood more easily by an Indian as it bears reference to a fundamental belief of Indian culture that the highest fulfillment of human life lies in the attainment of spiritual liberation and when *all* men (nay all sentient creatures having the capacity even necessity of experiencing pain) become liberated, the world would permanently cease to be.

According to this view, which Indians of almost all schools of thought accept, no limit in time can be set as to when *for the first time* the world was created. To put it differently, no legitimate sense can be given to the expression “absolutely first created world” or “absolutely first creation”. The Hindus generally believe that there has been a long series of creations and dissolutions at regular interval from limitless past. Though each single creation within this series has a definite beginning (and a definite end) the *series* of worlds or creations (of world) itself has no beginning. However the beginning less series of alternating creations and dissolutions is logically bound to come to an end. When this will happen all sentient creatures will be found

liberated. Or, alternatively and more correctly when all sentient creatures are spiritually liberated the process or series of creations (and dissolutions) will come to a permanent stop.

This is the background of Udayana's remarkable statement, we would soon discuss, about the creation of the universe. To appreciate how remarkable is the statement, we need to think independently, as an average intelligent man, how *natural*, if at all, it is for an average man to ask the question how the world was created or who created this world and when and so on. No one has ever seen it to have been produced and if there is no evident reason it can hardly cross the mind of any ordinary man to ask questions about the origin of the world or think about the sort of argument called cosmological argument. Few men at the most with peculiar theoretical bent of mind like those of ancient Ionian cosmologists or modern astro-physicists could think of such question. To put it simply, before we could ask about how the world was created or by whom we should either experience or infer that the world is created or is an effect. What could have suggested to man at the first instance that the world was an effect and that it should have some creator? In the Rgveda the question was voiced and it was also said that even deities did not know if and when the world was created (for they were also created later).²²⁶ Those who say that cosmological argument is an inductive argument originating with some observed fact or phenomenon are hard put to solve this problem. What is that experienced phenomenon or experience which as ground of inductive argument led or enabled men to prove the existence of God as the

creator? Even if we admit that the world is an observed fact, it's being an effect is not an observed fact. How can we then begin with the creation of the world as a given fact to prove the existence of God? It might have been the case that men began with the conception of God as the Supreme Being; and a part of our conception of supreme Being or his supremacy is that everything other than He comes from Him. If He is the only creator then everything else has been created.²²⁷ In this way we came to the idea of the world as created or created by God.²²⁸ Now we can make our inductive move to prove the existence of God. Under this interpretation, however, there would be no need to prove God inductively.

In their treatment of cosmological argument this issue is not discussed by the Christian theologians or philosophers of Europe. The Nyāya philosophers found the need to first prove the effect character of creation or the world. We tend to overlook this point for we use the words creation and the world interchangeably. The ground of the supposed inductive argument or cosmological argument is creation of the world. We begin by taking the world to have been created. However, the creation of the world is not an observed fact of anyone. How can it be made the ground or starting point of inductive argument for God as the familiar cosmological argument makes it to be?

Though it is not based on observation, the creation of the world, its effect character, could be a reasoned conclusion or conclusion of some good inference. In that case the first question to ask is "Is this world created?" What makes us think that it is so? Why the world has to

be created? What necessity is there that it should be created? Why cannot the world be always there as the Mimāṃsakas are said to believe or why should we not note with due importance what Swinburne said that there is no necessity from the scientific point of view why the world should be there at all.²²⁹ Udayana begins just here, with the question why the world is to be taken as an effect rather than as always non-existent or as ever present. He suggests that one feature of the world is too evident; all sentient creatures in it are constantly subjected to all sorts of suffering.²³⁰ But how this feature, its being full of suffering and pain (duḥkhamayatā), can lead us to asking the question about the creator of the world or lead us to infer that it has a creator? What connection this feature of the world has with its being an effect or having a creator and a divine creator at that?

What relation does the fact of evil or suffering in the world or our experience of them has to world's having been created or its having a creator, a creator god? Natural evils like flood or earthquake are not created at least by man. But why they have to be created at all? At this point Udayana makes the extraordinary statement which when almost literally translated reads thus "a world full of sorrow should not happen to be uncaused."²³¹ For uncaused things, he immediately adds, are of two kinds, either they are eternal i.e., or permanent or they are ever nonexistent, figment of imagination or hallucination. Does this make the position clear? We understand that if a thing is not uncaused then it would be caused. But do we understand why a system must be caused because it is full of sorrow? Udayana does not clarify it further; he thinks

that he has made his point. But what has he said? He has said a world full of sorrows and sufferings *should* not happen to be uncaused. What is the force of this *should*? Is it rational? Is it moral? We think both. But this is perhaps not rational in the sense of scientific rationality as it is ordinarily understood. But to say it is an irrational or non-rational way of thinking or speaking is simply unacceptable.

Udayana's point is that if such an evident fact as suffering were uncaused then it would have to be regarded, in the first instance, as imaginary like sky flower or eternal like truths of mathematics or logic.²³² Overwhelming majority will testify to the truth that the sufferings they are being subjected to almost constantly are real, as real as it could be. If suffering is real, if it is an actual fact of the world then there are two options. A thing that is real exists either necessarily or contingently; it is either eternal or non-eternal. Can we accept the alternative that sufferings that are real are necessary or eternal also? To accept it is to admit that there is in principle no respite from constant suffering? If men accepted it or, more importantly, if it were true then by now there would hardly be a man left in the world. They must have committed mass suicide (unless they lacked the ability to derive the rational implication of the thesis that sufferings are necessarily real). That they have not done that shows that they think they have some hope.

What sort of hope could it be? Could it be that men are dreaming from immemorial past; they have been dreaming or are being deceived into dreaming that suffering would be got rid of, that some

day we would have happiness or that we are having enough happiness right now? If it were true we would have to conclude that man was not rational. But if he is rational and discerning enough then he will not be convinced by the assurance or assertion that right now there is more than enough happiness which makes our living worthwhile. Only thing that explains the continuity of human race or human existence in this world is the reasoned conclusion that the world and the sufferings in it are all contingent and non-eternal.²³³ But to say that something is real but non-eternal, that it is contingently real, is to say that it is caused or created. Once its character as caused or as effect is thus established many things follow. First this truth brings with it the hope that once we can get rid of the causes of suffering we would be happy or at least have freedom from all sufferings. The only legitimate search and project that can give (ultimate) meaning to life and its activity relate then to the question what caused this world and sufferings in it and how we can get rid of these causes. (Let us not jump to the conclusion that man would like to get rid of God who is a cause of the world and all the effect that are there including sufferings themselves. For there are other causes which unlike God are non-eternal and hence could be got rid of). This search when rationally conducted is philosophy or darśana.

Udayana's inquiry into this question – his analysis of this feature of the world and his drawing the logical consequences of it – leaves us in no doubt that Udayana has presented a rational account in the book in question of the matters discussed there. We should however note that the book is devoted to proving God on the dual basis of logical

arguments and scriptural utterances. He himself said so in the very first verse of the book. His account is one of the best examples of rational and analytical philosophical discourse that has ever been produced on the subject. In the history of philosophy it is one of the best discussions that realist philosophy has ever produced. It further shows the perfect compatibility between scriptural and rational evidences. Their strong belief in this compatibility which they willingly allow to determine their thinking and practice earned for the Hindu thinkers the description authoritarian rationalist.²³⁴

Udayana is not the first Naiyāyika to discuss the proofs for the existence of God. Before him Uddyotakara discussed them at great length and depth. But the insightful statement with which Udayana begins has no parallel. Besides he has devoted one book of considerable length exclusively to the proofs of God. Be that as it may, Naiyāyika-s do not say that they prove God as the cause of the world in the first instance or in one go. They first prove that the world is produced, is an effect, then they prove that there is an intelligent agent who produced the world and then on the basis of some further logical considerations they come to conclude that this intelligent agent could not be any finite being; he must be omniscient, all powerful and all kind etc. And since God is the *name* of such an agent or an agent with whom we associate these properties, they think that they have succeeded in proving God's existence.

It is neither possible nor necessary here to state or examine in any detail the eight or nine arguments given by Udayana and at least

another one that may be found in Yogadarśana. For a brief, authentic and comparative account of some of these Indian arguments for the existence of God we can hardly do anything better than refer to a paper by Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya.²³⁵ Professor Bhattacharya's erudition and authority in the fields of both Western and Hindu philosophy is known to be beyond question and his considered opinion is that in relative assessment arguments of the Hindu theistic philosophers, particularly of the Nyāya school, are superior *on purely rational ground*. He also takes care to state that he meant by rational what is usually meant by the word in the philosophical literature of the modern scientific Europe.

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We would like to include only a little more of the cosmological argument of the Naiyāyika-s. They are convinced that this world which is full of suffering must have been created. But what does this mean? They do not deny that in this world or the universe there are many things that are permanent and the question of their creation does not arise. So by created world they mean the totality of only created things or effects (*kāryasamūha*). Though the creation of the world is not an observed fact yet a large part of the world is observably created. On the basis of this we make a meaningful concept (not a fact) of creation which means, as just said, the totality of all created things. Only some of these things, such as the pot which we see the potter creates, we know from our personal and immediate perception to be created thing. And the qualities and actions of such created things are also created.

Most basic among the created things are created matter like a pot or this piece of cloth which we can verify to have been created on the basis of our own experience. But we have never perceived the creation of such material things as mountains or the sun or the air or water and the like. We can and often do perceptually know that these material things are not all of equal magnitude, volume, dimension, or size. The sun is much larger than the earth and the body of an elephant is much bigger than that of an ant. It follows that if they have constituent parts then the number of constituent parts of the smaller things is less than the number of the constituent parts of the relatively larger or bigger things. For – the variation in number of constituent parts of material things – to be possible, each material thing that has part must be finitely divisible. In other words if we go on dividing a created material thing of *finite* size, however large or small, we will necessarily (theoretically) come to a point where the constituent parts we arrive at cannot be divided any further. This end point of the process of physical analysis or otherwise continuous process of division of any material thing of a finite²³⁶ size, is called atom (in the original sense of non-portable or non-divisible part of matter) or *paramāṇu* in the Vaiśeṣika system. By definition a *paramāṇu* cannot be divided (further), rather it marks the point at which the process of division of matter stops. It is the simplest, fundamental, ultimate and *eternal* constituent of material creation. *Paramāṇu* itself is therefore not created and not created by God even. God creates the totality of the *created* things and not everything, not certainly the eternal things.

To make it short, the creation of a material thing starts at the stage of material dyad by combining or joining, two *paramāṇu*-s. The result of this combination is a binary material particle which is the first ever, conceptually and physically, created material substance each of the two constituents of which is eternal. The binary particle or material dyad or *dvyāṇuka* is created and non-eternal. Though non-eternal these dyads can combine following certain laws to create material triad and they in their turn can combine to create till grosser material substance and so on till we arrive at things like jar or mountains or the sun or the moon and so on. We will not go into the argument of the Nyāya why the created world cannot be created or get created in one go but only gradually and step by step. But it may be important to note that the Naiyāyikas say what a seed is to a tree that grows from it, *Dvyāṇuka*, the first created matter, is to the whole created world. With the creation of material dyad begins the creation of the material world (material things and their non eternal properties).

The question is how the *paramāṇu*-s could combine? Being material they are devoid of any consciousness, will or purpose.²³⁷ We, the finite beings, do not have the sort of knowledge, will and purpose to do the job either. It follows that the consciousness, will, etc. of some being other than ourselves must have made it possible for the *paramāṇu*-s to combine or the process of creation to start. If we understand by creating the world the creation of the first ever created matter as explained then we have to admit that some other kind of conscious, desiring and willing being is there. Such reasoning or

inference proves according to the Naiyāyika-s an agent other than man as the creator. This non-human creator admittedly has the knowledge and willpower which we do not have and which are infinitely more than we could ever manage to have. God is the name of such a creator. This is part of the notion of God as the Naiyāyika-s have it and this is one of the arguments – the cosmological argument – which allows the Naiyāyika-s to admit God's existence.

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We have shown that Nyāya theism is quite rational as far as one of the core areas of theism – belief in the existence of personal God – is concerned. Objective comparative assessment would show that this Hindu theistic argument is highly rational and developed. In comparison to it the Christian cosmological argument does not seem to be equally developed in respect of logical sophistication and elaboration. Be that as it may, since it advances arguments in support of their belief in the existence of God Christian theology also displays a spirit of rationalism. In view of this we should review the earlier statement that one common point of first three challenges which target religion as such is that religion and reason do not go together, that in the age of science or scientific rationality there is no place for religion; or religion is a matter of faith and tradition than reason. We need to reopen the issue of compatibility between science and religion and decide on some answer only after going through, among other things, the extremely subtle and elaborate literature on the subject produced by the Naiyāyika-s over centuries. They did not repeat the arguments centuries after centuries. At every point of time they entertained and often anticipated,

objections against any particular statement or formulation of the arguments in question, and improved upon the earlier version. They have carried their analysis and formulation to a near perfect stage of rational enterprise. To pass judgment whether belief in God can or cannot be rational without studying this literature will be childish. Ignorance of fact is no excuse in comparative assessment or religion.

Today comparison of religion and philosophy of religion has become easier in that there is a definite area of inquiry, certain definite problem, which religion and philosophy of religion have been investigating for long and modern science has started investigating recently. The origin or the creation of the world is that issue. For centuries science did not worry about the origin of the universe and it was left to mythology, religion or philosophy (metaphysics). Cosmological argument of the theists had some point as no other explanation was available. Hawking reported that even the other day the Pope suggested science might discuss about the happenings of things in the world but not about the creation of the world which was a matter for Christian religion or theology to discuss. But the fact is that now physics, a branch of it, has offered in the form of big bang theory a scientific account of the origin of the world. If now we find that the account of the same phenomenon by the European Christian theology is incompatible with the explanation offered by European science then two issues become most serious. One is the question of choosing between them. But there is another question also. To which of these the larger vision of the European society is geared and how the same culture could give rise to two world views one religious and the other scientific which are mutually incompatible? Supposing we have two

explanations – one scientific and the other theological –then the latter would be branded unscientific²³⁸ and hence not rational. We therefore need to discuss both the compatibility between the two and the question of internal consistency of the Christian theological account of creator God. Both these issues – and both Christian theology and modern physics – involve reference to time. This complicates the notion of God and also the account of creation. We have discussed these larger and intricate issues elsewhere. We would like to note simply that first we need to specify some core area and concept which is common to both these theories before we can compare them meaningfully. For example God is a part of the theological explanation which hardly has any parallel or counterpart in the scientific explanation. Between the two theories of creation – of European Christian theology and modern European science²³⁹ – time is a common element. The conception and / or theory of time is central to the theory of creation in both European science and theology as well as the realist philosophy of Nyāya. Without discussing the three theories of time we cannot do full justice to cosmological argument of different cultures and their different schools of thought or their compatibility with scientific rationality. We have discussed these issues in some detail elsewhere.²⁴⁰ There we also discussed the other issue or the problem created by jointly ascribing certain properties to God, which almost all theists found necessary. We cannot repeat them here or reopen the issue again. In the process of said discussion we found that the theory of Nyāya presented one of the most satisfying and rational accounts of the creation of the world. We now turn to examine if we can get a reasonable account of religion from the realists.

CHAPTER NINE

A Realist Philosophy of Religion

We do not like to say anything about whether a realist must be a theist or not. But a realist philosophy must have a place for religion just as it must have a place for psychology. A central feature of realism is its commitment to non-reductivism. According to a philosophy of this kind religious experience has objective validity and religious statements have cognitive content. These statements, at least some of them, are descriptive of fact even if that fact is of a different order than the facts with which science deals.

When a realist philosophy deals with religious phenomena it can be said to be a Philosophy of religion in the usual²⁴¹ sense of philosophy with its rigorous analysis, logical approach and truth claim²⁴². As philosophy it is a rational and intellectual enterprise. So even when it gives due importance to religious scripture it does so because it is rational to do so. This partly answers the questions if, how and where the distinction is to be drawn between (realist) philosophy of religion and theology. There does not seem to be an agreed view as to the scope or nature of this branch of philosophy. Its scope should be wider than that of theology but sometimes the scope of these two disciplines overlap. However, the theology as practised by theologians is often less rigorous than the treatment of 'theological' subjects by professional philosophers. Philosophy is nothing if it is not rigorous and analytical.²⁴³ One of the concerns of philosophy of religion is to examine the form,

content and source of religious beliefs. This may be taken to presuppose that we already know what religion is or have some criterion to identify certain belief as religious belief and distinguish it from other sorts of belief. However, it was never found easy to devise or find a generally acceptable definition of religion. From long past it is intuitively known what religion is. Men have been claiming since long to have it; they are talking about it, discussing it, and disagreeing and debating about religious matters. Still our intuitive awareness seems to be defying attempts to turn it into a fully clarified theoretical understanding. However, we have made advance in some other areas of the vast field of religion. We have attained reasonable success in formulating clearly and definitely some of the debatable issues regarding the form and content of religious beliefs and about their source or sources. Our options have been restricted to virtually two. Religious beliefs are descriptive of facts or they are expressive of emotions. As to what that relevant fact or emotion is needs more clarifications than are currently available. So far as the question of source is concerned our options seem again are limited to two: reason and faith. The students of mainstream philosophy need to realize that the exact distinction between knowledge and faith or even the exact nature of what is called religious experience is no less an important theme of philosophy of religion than the proofs for the existence of God.

Many believe that religion is a matter of faith and not knowledge and as such it cannot be a legitimate field of inquiry for philosophy. But it has also remained debatable whether philosophy is concerned with knowledge or truth at all; some think it is not.²⁴⁴ Some again think even if philosophy is concerned with truth the sense of truth it has or the kind

of truth it seeks is different from that of science. More important point is that even if we admit that religion, as Kant said, is a matter of faith and not knowledge²⁴⁵, philosophy to discuss the exact difference between the two as well as the exact nature of each of them.²⁴⁶ In this context we must define our position with regard to the competing options of will to believe and the ethics of belief. Faith is defined as "belief unsupported by evidence"²⁴⁷ and hence wanting in justification. The question is if there is no justification or evidence why do we believe in religious doctrines, which makes us believe them? Some appear to think that to say that we believe something on faith amounts to saying that we believe certain things not because there is evidence or justification for believing them but because we have *will* to believe. This will to believe is a fact and has got sympathetic treatment from James in his book *The Will to Believe*. James does not want man to believe *any* unsupported belief; but he thinks one should not be unduly cautious and refuse to believe something just because there is not sufficient evidence for it or that the possibility of error in the case cannot be ruled out. James's point seems to be that when one feels strong will to believe something one should accept the belief on that ground. The examples he gave from religion itself may not be very convincing rather it is problematic. But his point may not be missed either. Too much of caution itself may turn out to be harmful.

Though it is no virtue to be credulous yet Clifford's views in his "The Ethics to Believe" seems to be too stringent. He thinks, as Burr puts it, "[I]t is *always* wrong to believe *anything* without evidence, since such a belief could either produce some harm or lead the holder to accept too readily other unsupported and potentially harmful beliefs. Our

beliefs should be determined by an assessment of the evidence and probabilities involved, not by unfounded hopes and wishes.”²⁴⁸ We think that such rival views and stances on the matter give us a good start to philosophical activity of balancing between will to believing and ethics of believing. It will help if we distinguish what may be called lazy faith from a creative faith.

In case the faith is creative it is only its negative mark that it involves accepting or believing something without evidence. On the positive side creative faith always involves some hope, not just the pragmatic utilitarian hope that it will serve some purpose but more substantive and realist hope that evidence may be found out. Where there is authentically strong will to believe something without adequate support at the moment there is involved hope that with serious and sustained effort supporting evidence or argument will be discovered. So far faith, creative faith, is the beginning of the long philosophical journey towards, our committed search for evidence and truth. It is not always the case that evidence (on its own) presents itself and coerces us to believing something. We search for the evidence for what we begin by accepting on faith. At the time of accepting it on faith we had strong hope of finding the evidence. In such cases of authentic and creative faith, we are inclined or impelled by strong will to believe. We may and we do believe in many truths that shape our life, give meaning to it and even transform it long before the third person evidence is discovered. The saying that philosophy is finding reason for what we believe on instinct or believe intuitively is not unfounded. In India we sometime draw a distinction between a *Rṣi* (literary seer, roughly men possessing wisdom) and a dārśanika (roughly philosopher). A philosopher begins by

accepting certain utterances the *Rṣi* made on the basis of first person evidence for their truth, that is, their immediate experience, realization or conviction. But the philosopher does so not as a lazy hopeful, but only as a sanguine and creative thinker and seeker of rational evidence that will prove not only to his own satisfaction but also to the satisfaction of others, the truth of what those *Rṣi-s* said. Philosophy is not a freelance thinking but a committed thinking, committed not to defending whatever it begins by believing or accepting – begins by believing or accepting on the basis of instinct, intuition, tradition or whatever – but committed to the hope of finding reason in support or against it, hope of being able to rationally confirming or disconfirming the starting belief. Indian philosophers have one more point to add. If there was no initial belief (or there was strong disbelief) in the possibility of the starting thesis turning out true or no hope that adequate supporting evidence would be found, then the whole business of subjecting the thesis to philosophical inquiry – examination, analysis, interpretation, reconstruction and so on – would be a nonstarter. Hope is thus a necessary starting point. Nonetheless this hope is not what knowledge gets reduced to as the pragmatists, like Rorty, think. For years top ranking astro-physicists have been searching for GUT or evidence for it. What sustains them in their long search is hope, not unfounded lazy hope but authentic hope. How long scientists had to wait to find out evidence for the physical existence of God particle! Lazy faith is an excuse for not making any effort to convince ourselves or others rationally either on the plea that what is believed on faith cannot be justified rationally or that there is no need for evidence, no need is felt for the search of evidence. Lazy and inauthentic faith is not

accompanied by any commitment, any genuine hope of finding supporting evidence. This is how we wish to balance the will to believe and ethics of belief in such important matter as religion.

Reference to the possibility of harm (or benefit) is less solid and more slippery a ground. What hope do we have of arriving at consensus when it is the question of evidence for believing some religious truth? Believing in God is regarded as a social evil or source of such evils. It kills human initiative and man's sense of responsibility; it moreover supplies necessary means to exploit greater section of people. We hardly can do anything better here than remember almost the last words of Socrates. "And you, too, judges, [B]elieve this as a truth that no evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death." Incidentally this reminds one of the utterance of Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā.²⁴⁹ Anyway, to return to Socrates, He continues "His fortunes are not neglected by the gods; and what has happened to me today has not happened by chance. I am persuaded that it was better for me to die now and to be released from trouble; And so I am not at all angry with my accusers or with those who have condemned me to die. Yet it was not with this in mind that they accused me and condemned me, but meaning to do me an injury. So far I may blame them". "Yet I have one request to make ... punish them [my sons] and harass them If they seem to you to care for riches or for any other more than virtue; and if they think that they are something when they are really nothing, reproach them For not caring for what they should, and for thinking that they are great men when they are worthless." "But now time has come, and we must go away – I to die, and you to live. Whether life or death is better is known to God, and to God only".²⁵⁰ This is one of the best examples of effective

and creative faith that shaped, in this case, the life of a person whose name became synonymous with ceaseless search or rationally convincing analysis leading to the truth and true meaning. If the faith just expressed was not the most effective and living force what else could be? This is what we mean when we hold and say that doing philosophy as personal culture alone can be the real foundation of philosophy as public institution or formal academic profession. The converse is not true.

We remember this here as an example of what living faith is, and what benefit it brings to life though it is unlikely to be recognized as sufficient to make the belief ethical as Clifford understands it or is acceptable by utilitarian and pragmatist standard in general. But the point remains, just as hope and will to believe play important role in the personal life of a philosopher (and of others also) they have or should be allowed to have a role to play in his professional life. William James was aware of this and admitted it openly. What realist philosophers contend is that even when we agree to this we find no convincing reason to think, as men like Rorty do, that this reduces knowledge to Hope.

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My use of the expression realist philosophy of religion will not surprise philosophy professionals in general including those who are my colleagues. Even lay intellectuals would not be intrigued either, for the expressions like pragmatist philosophy of religion, pragmatist theist etc. occur frequently in hugely popular works of general interest like Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and Social Hope*; it is a different matter if

they have not noted it. However, when we use the expression realist philosophy of religion we do not mean simply that our philosophy of religion differs only from the pragmatist philosophy or view of religion. We also differ from views like positivism, logical positivism or neo-empiricism, and mysticism. So far as pragmatism is concerned there are at least four leaders – Pierce, James, Dewey and Rorty – who deserved to be studied and discussed thoroughly. We would have discussed them any way if we had scope. One would expect us to discuss at least William James not only because he frankly admitted to have personal religious experience but also because of his writing the justly famous and beautiful book *Varieties of religious experience*. Many of his views and remarks deserve attention even today. For example he urged not to mock (religious) people who believe that “the best things are the more eternal things”; James called this thesis “the religious hypothesis”.²⁵¹ But the generally reductionist and or relativist position of a pragmatist, which reduces belief into habit of action and truth to usefulness, can hardly make sense of religious beliefs excepting as a case of faith, perhaps personal faith.²⁵² Even so James thinks that unless one is dogmatic one must accept religion as useful, if not true. We are no less, perhaps more, convinced than pragmatists that religion is useful. More, because pragmatist position is that if religion is useful then it is ‘true’ and just to that extent. We on the contrary hold that whatever benefit religion yields comes from the fact that it is true. Real usefulness has its basis in truth and not the other way round.

To return to his pragmatism, James was not prepared to take a negative stand with respect to religion. How could we deny, he would say, that we derive benefit from religious convictions? They raise our

spirits, protect us from discouragement, and fill us with optimism.²⁵³ An atheist or even pragmatist theist will point out that many individuals believe in religion for the reason that many if not all religious doctrines are useful. The point of Rorty is that the sort of usefulness the religious doctrines have will not constitute their claim to acceptability. For the use they are supposed to have consists ultimately in killing human initiative for social progress, supporting fundamentalists inflicting humiliation and pain and suffering on people who do not profess their creed and so on.²⁵⁴ In sum it is inconsistent for pragmatist to admit any factual content of religious beliefs or that such beliefs are true or (socially) useful. As realist (and not just as a private individual) we are committed to admitting both truth and value of religion. Though we have no scope to engage in debate with the pragmatists or examine their theses and arguments, we thought it necessary to reveal our differences from the pragmatists. This is one justification for our using the expression realist philosophy of religion.

Logical positivists have one thing common with the pragmatists, which is important for our present purpose and in respect of which we differ from both. Members of none of these two schools admit that religious beliefs are true in the sense of having factual content or as representing facts. They, therefore, do not admit religious beliefs to be true, at least, in the realist sense of the term. For the logical positivists religious beliefs do not describe any state of affairs actual or possible. They at the most express subjective emotions.²⁵⁵ This non-cognitivism or denial of literary meaning in respect of religious beliefs and utterances is one respect in which the realists differ from the logical positivists. Further unlike realists, logical positivists seem to be necessarily atheists.

We separately mention our difference from positivist philosophy because many people do not know or remember that logical positivism is not the only form of positivism. Those who are duly careful themselves use and ask others to use logical empiricism in place of logical positivism to avoid confusion. Positivism or positivist philosophy was invented by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) who first coined the word sociology; perhaps this is also true about the term positivism. For our present context it is important to remember that Comte, if not first, was one of the first few thinkers, who seriously tried to reconcile science with religion not along pragmatist line or logical empiricist line. The second point to note is that he did not repudiate religion. Almost as a case of counter revolution²⁵⁶ he created a new religion; he called it positivist religion. It was a form or religion which was complete with its list of saints, holy days and festivities. Comte to my mind was also first to conceive of religion of humanity. Following is a faithful exposition of Comte's mature thinking in the matter of religion or at least his religion of humanity. "As it has always done, religion will unite human beings and order their lives, will keep alive consciousness of their ties to the Higher Being, and teach people their duty (never rights). In contradistinction to the old myths, the positive religion will be able to bring about perfect harmony between mankind's emotional and intellectual needs."²⁵⁷ I doubt if Rorty who is most vocal among those who seek to popularize pragmatism ever discussed these aspects of Comte's positive religion, and yet it sounds so similar to Rorty's "social hopes – hopes for a global, cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society".²⁵⁸ Incidentally realists share all these hopes

but they do not share the hope that religion could be shown to be necessarily either useless or devoid of factual truth.

As realist our main concern is Rorty's Pragmatist agenda, which he says he derived from Dewey, of demolishing dualism. Rorty thinks that the greatest source of all social evils is dualism, Platonic sort of dualism, to be precise, which orders experience and facts in binary framework. While he finds it to be the greatest fault, our realism commits us to dualism. This however, *explains* why we differ from pragmatism and why our philosophy of religion is a realist philosophy of it. Explanation by itself is not justification. We have hardly enough scope for justifying our position to the extent needed. Nor can we cannot undertake a full scale debate with pragmatism. Here we are interested only in explaining why we used the expression realist philosophy of religion. It suffices to say that a realist philosophy of religion believes in the objectivity of ethical and religious experience and judgments. It also believes that realm of facts is not exhausted by only the natural or sensuous matters. In short religious experience and statements also have cognitive content.

In the Indian context we have another project. In India Advaita Vedānta is in a sense more radical critique of dualism. What is most important in the context of theory of religion is that they have produced till date the most comprehensive interpretation of the Hindu scripture, particularly the Upanisadic literature, along the uncompromising monistic or better non-dualist line. This form of monism has huge popularity all over the world though very few people care to understand analytical Vedānta authentically. The popular Vedānta is a real

hindrance in the way of the proper study of realist Hindu philosophy of religion as well as the authentic and analytical system of non-dualistic Vedānta philosophy. The followers of Vedānta philosophy, the real scholars of it, needs must do something to save this philosophy from the possible and actual distortions being inflicted by the sentimental approach to Vedānta of the makers and followers of popular Vedānta including some liberal Hindus. So far as the realist philosophers are concerned they urgently need to revive the unfinished project of producing a comprehensive interpretation of the Upanisadic literature along realist and dualist line.²⁵⁹

From the mystics we differ not because we do not admit the value of mystic experience or because the mystics do not admit objective content of religious beliefs (in fact they admit such content). Mystical experience of genuine mystics²⁶⁰ is a matter of highest value. But there are many more things in religion which are of value and which are not non-communicable. In fact if these were incommunicable then religion would not have been of such great social service. Religion is not exhausted by the private experience of a few mystics. It is a social institution, it is to unite men, enlighten them about the inner and deeper significance of life and existence, and guide them to the higher fulfillment of life. In short it is to make our life *on earth* purposeful and hence happy in a creative sense. This requires religion to be communicable, teachable, performable and debatable. We do not admit essential ineffability even of mystic experience. To express their experience in language the mystic may need to have greater command and deeper understanding of language which these people rarely have.²⁶¹ So there is nothing, no reality, no experience and the like, which

is ineffable in principle. Part of the meaning of mysticism is that first, there is no objective method or procedure following which *any one* can attain to the highest mystic experience or direct communion with God or Truth. Secondly, there is no commonly intelligible language in which we can express (or through which we can communicate) genuine religious experience. Once we give this sense to mysticism, we can safely say that, contrary to common belief and assertion, India is not a mystic culture. Otherwise systems like Yoga and Nyāya could not develop and have such a long, uninterrupted and glorious history. What is more to the point is that Yoga and Nyāya work as allies and not as adversaries.²⁶² It should also be noted that Śaṅkarācārya not only did not criticize or reject Nyāya but made positive reference to it. Soft spiritualists of modern India need to take serious note of this truth. With this brief sketch of what is here meant by realist philosophy of religion, we now turn to provide from the point of view of such philosophy an account of religion, we will not try to offer a strict and precise definition of religion though. Many unsuccessful attempts in this direction have been made in the past. It is also widely known that some philosophers have tried a different method of listing religion making features. Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya has combined both these methods in his answer to the question what is religion. We refer the readers to this account.²⁶³ We ourselves will try still another method.

CHAPTER TEN

On Man's Acquiring Religion

One may demand or expect that a realist philosopher would be able to first tell us what they mean by religion. The question what is religion is normally viewed as a demand for definition. Innumerable men have said it innumerable times that it is very difficult, to say the least, to define religion. At the same time, some sort of definition is necessary for any meaningful and critical discussion of a subject which involves reference to or examination of many conflicting accounts of the phenomenon in question. Many different persons have defined it in many different ways. Notice has been taken of nearly all kinds of definitions of religion or religion making features in the essay "Varieties of Religious Discipline" by Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya. We keep those in mind and wish not so much to give a single precise definition of religion but a sort of philosophical account of how men came to have religion, not historically but conceptually. In the absence of a precise definition of it a reliable conceptual account of how men came to acquire religion may prove useful. We will still discuss a little about the definition of religion or about why the demand for it is quite natural and legitimate.

Definition is a necessary part of philosophical inquiry or enterprise.²⁶⁴ Philosophy of religion is a *theory* – philosophical theory – of religion. The very purpose of building a theory is to go beyond, if not completely replace, the intuitive knowledge of the subject in question and attain theoretical understanding of it. Two necessary components

of the theoretical understanding of a subject are proper definition and systematic classification of it. This is one good reason why at least in philosophy of religion men seek and demand a definition of religion notwithstanding their awareness that it is enormously difficult to define it . There is a second reason also why we need a definition of religion. One can hardly deny that, as a matter of fact, there is such a thing as religion and further that there are many religions. The challenge which the theoreticians face is to make sense of both the unity and diversity of religion. The question is if there are many different religions what makes them differ from one another in a theoretically as well as religiously important way; and if there are such differences among them what makes them all religion in some theoretically and religiously significant sense? What are the acceptable religion making characteristics? It is nothing unusual to aspire to have as perfect an understanding of religions or religious traditions as possible and also of the relations among them.

Not infrequently man's incomplete and imperfect knowledge of religion contributed substantially to interfaith hostility. More depth and perfection we attain in our understanding of religion and different religious traditions more hope and confidence we would have that the challenge to society allegedly posed by religion – religious rivalry – can be overcome. It is also pertinent to ask whether or not the problematic of intra religion relationships raise philosophically or religiously new problems that need different treatment. Earlier we referred to simultaneous presence of interfaith harmony at one level and interfaith hostility at another level in the context of the same two religions. Similarly the very distinction between intra-faith relationship and

interfaith relationship sometimes challenges our ability to understand. In such cases we need to take help of every method and measure to obtain clearer understanding of the phenomena being studied. Similarly a sharply defined conception of religion can enable us to distinguish between religious conflicts and conflict between different religious communities. The importance of this in minimizing or solving interfaith hostility cannot be denied. Previously also we remarked that some different religious communities clash over some no-religious issue. An example of one such an issue to which men often refer to, is the *political* issue, between two religious communities, namely who should rule her after the British quit India. Just as it is of great help to have a clearer understanding of religion in general and also of particular religions the enormous variety of religions and their different histories make it very difficult to cover them all within the scope of any single definition which would be sufficiently precise or specific.²⁶⁵ For example there are religions the histories of which are closely associated with the history of many military expeditions or with the history of conflict between the state and the church.²⁶⁶ Religion as a socio-cultural phenomenon is extremely complex. Such complexities may not have much bearing on the personal life of a practitioner of (certain particular) religion or on religion as personal culture; but in a theory of religion these have one bearing at least that they make it all the more difficult to find one single generally acceptable and at the same time good definition of religion.²⁶⁷

Theoretically one can proceed, it seems, in two different ways. One may decide a priori that such and such properties are the defining properties of religion and then discard any faith which fails to have them as not a

religion or as a pseudo religion. The other approach is to begin by accepting as religion all and whatever men generally refer to, as a matter of fact, as religion and then find some stable and common properties of all these. Thereafter religion will be anything that displays all or many of these features. It will be futile to argue that science or atheism does not accept that there is any such thing as religion, anything to which the word religion correctly applies. For to deny religion does not or does not necessarily mean that men deny that there is certain phenomenon which many people as a matter of fact call religion. It rather means that men deny the legitimacy of their so describing the phenomenon. It may be found illegitimate for two reasons. The concept of religion itself is inconsistent and so nothing real can satisfy it. Or the things the word is used to signify are so disparate that no specifiable meaning, strictly speaking, can be ascribed to the term used to designate them. Science being an empirical inquiry distinguished by its commitment to fact-fidelity does not deny religion but denies the truth of what religion says or teaches. Religion as a set of beliefs and practices common to large masses of man is a fact and cannot be denied. Exactly which beliefs and which practices do or should constitute religion is a matter of controversy. Similarly the truth of some of the doctrines and statements of a certain religion may be debated or denied. Science would contest, will not accept as true, the Christian belief about the age of the world derived from the Christian scripture. Besides science even Hinduism disagrees with this teaching of the Christian scripture. However, science or we, in the name of science, cannot deny that there are more or less specifiable set of beliefs and

practices which is largely common to men called Christian. Same is true so far as Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam is concerned. Certain beliefs are common to men of a particular religion. But there are also beliefs which are common to people of different religions. All major religions or at least all theistic religions believe in God and prayer though even here, one should not, however, expect that in every religion people understand or accept God in the same sense of the term or associate the same set of properties (understood in the same way) with God . Because some religions claim to be non-theistic is not enough ground for not considering the belief in god as one of the most common features of religious traditions. Even those non-theistic traditions which do not, for special reasons, admit God or deny it appear to understand what others mean by the expression. Otherwise they could not endeavour so hard to deny God or offer argument to that end. Similarly certain group of varied practices can be identified as the practice of prayer and this also is very common in different religions. Anyway, we can and do identify a manageable set of markers of religion. So long we have this, the unavailability of a precise definition of the sort available in some other theory, for its own subject, should not count as a very serious problem. Unavailability of precise definition of religion or religious matters may be due partly to the fact that these things are exceedingly complex. Further religion is qualitatively so rich that it defies precise quantitative treatment. Science provides more precise definition because it treats quantitative aspect of the phenomena it studies. Even so there are areas where scientists frankly admit not only that they cannot give a precise definition of certain thing but also, and

partly because of that, they do not have proper theoretical understanding of it. However some such phenomena are so central to science that we cannot conceive of science without them. We have discussed elsewhere that time is one such thing.²⁶⁸

We said that religion refuses to be defined precisely and why it does so. We have also said that we will not attempt such a definition instead we will offer certain account of how men came to have religion. Even this will prove very difficult and the nature of the task being what it is, we may have to forego the usual rigour of presentation. Further the analysis of the situation to be presented here may go beyond mere descriptive or prescriptive uses of language. We may sometimes follow the examples of edifying literature and its language.

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The question how a man becomes religious is different in important ways from any one of the other three questions such as how he came to change his religion, became anti-religious or turned non-religious. The idea is that almost always a man knows how he was forced, if he was at all forced, to change his religion. Similarly a man knows what considerations, academic, theoretical, moral or any other, led him to consciously choose to become a member of a different religion, or of the group of anti-religious or irreligious people. We rarely change our religion unknowingly; we know about the shift when we willingly or under pressure change our religion. But a man is hardly ever conscious or can say when he came to have for the first time the religion he has (and which he is perhaps quitting now). This seems to be true about any particular man. Man does not usually acquire or choose his religion but

is born in it. A human child is born in a religion or inherits certain specifiable set of beliefs and practices from his predecessors whom he largely imitates. And this is what is described as his religion and his coming to have it. However, in case of every founded religion it is legitimate to ask and possible to answer who first had this religion, where and when. In such cases having religion, at least for the founder²⁶⁹ or at least for the first few direct disciples of the founder, is as much a conscious event of one's life as the event of one's first day in office. Unless we admit that all religions first came into being with the founding of them by their respective founders or hold that every religion is necessarily a founded religion, it is most likely that the first member of a founded religion is a convert from another and earlier religion. Just as every human child is born in a linguistic community even if later his language is changed (may be too early in his life, in infancy²⁷⁰) so also it is quite likely or even theoretically compelling to hold that every man (or at least almost all men) is born in a certain religion. The Hindus do not believe that there was ever a time, at least in human history when, there was no religion.²⁷¹ So without denying the fact that most of the world religions are founded or revealed at a certain particular time in human history yet it is safe to say that it does not make good sense to ask when man came to *have* religion for the *first time*. Just as (some) scientists cannot make any sense of the expression 'time before big bang' so our realist philosophy of religion does not give any meaning to the expression 'time before religion (as such)'. The first Christian, the first Islam, the first Bauddha is more likely a religious convert. Though such a man was not born a Christian or a Bauddha yet there is no necessity that he was without a religion, that there was no

earlier religion to which he could be a member. Those early religions might have disappeared in the meantime or what comes almost to the same thing, failed to preserve their separate identities. More likely, as in case of Buddhism, the earlier religions continued to remain as before (*may be* with a little less popularity, and less number of members at the most), only a new religion was born or introduced. We have seen how old was the history of religion in Greece and in India and further how many religious communities or traditions were there whether in Greece or Rome or Arabia in the pre-Semitic period of history! It is reasonable to hold therefore that every man is born a religious man.²⁷²

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Though we cannot ask meaningfully when the first ever religion was created or when man came to have religion for the first time yet we can ask about any particular human individual when he became *aware of having* a religion for the first time. For, this often happens when he is grown up and is in a state of intense awareness of some sort. This is the inner story. Outwardly he may be practising or even believing a certain religion as a matter of inherited practice which has become quite a habit with him. He is practising it for a long time, since soon after he was born. But there comes a moment, at least in the life of some men, when man sets himself on the path of religious quest. Even this he may be able to tell only after due retrospection. For when he first set himself on the religious journey he was not perhaps fully aware or clear about the nature of this quest, that it was his *religious* quest. Nonetheless he was aware of a certain change in his inner life (not necessarily mystic or incomunicable) – his feeling and emotion, his sense of value and vision of life changed distinctly and definitely. He may even come to intensely

feel or realize, all on a sudden, the value (or lack of value as the case may be) and significance of his usual religious beliefs and practices. The experiential dimension of religion dawns on him with all its depth and richness. This experiential aspect of religion or religious life is not necessarily incompatible with the behavioural aspect of the same life. Nor are the two totally disconnected. Anyway, this coming to be distinctly *aware* of having religion (though not at first what religion precisely is) in some sense is what we describe here as man's acquiring religion. He does not acquire it in the sense of consciously procuring a certain finished product called religion. He comes to experience certain urge for a distinct life, different mode of being – thinking, feeling and acting which the wise know and he will know in future to be religion.

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If we can grasp the dawning of certain distinct experience or type of experience which can variously be described as coming to be conscious of one's religion, realizing the value of religious beliefs and practices and so on then we can construct a philosophical account of the origin of religion as such – of what it means, in case of a certain particular man or any particular man, to become religious or to have a religion. Such an account would not be a factual or historical account in any usual sense. But if it is likely to be the sort of personal account which an authentic religious man would offer when pressed then it deserves to be taken seriously. Religion is first suggested to a man as the thought of a mode of life which is different from and better than the life he actually leads. The given life or the lived life (at the moment) is quite familiar. But the new life the idea of which is dawning on him is not clear rather vague;

nonetheless it exerts a strong pull which tends to draw man away from the familiar and sort of secured life.

Before a man can clearly understand or formulate it, he feels somewhat dissatisfied with the given life or the actual life he is living at the moment. He has a distinct kind of feeling of dissatisfaction which is different from the sort of usual dissatisfaction he is quite used to experiencing since at least the day he left his infancy. It is not dissatisfaction over a certain particular condition of life say poverty or imprisonment and the like. He realizes that life itself is unsatisfying or unfulfilling. He finds in his own life and in the life of all around him some deficiency or other.²⁷³ He misses there what he needed or wanted and finds many things he wanted to avoid. It often happens at this point of his life that he meets some – usually very few – other individuals like him who is undergoing similar experiences or transformations. Not that he meets these men for the first time; but when he met some of them earlier, in case he had met them earlier, he did not notice or could not appreciate their sort of unusual ways of speaking and acting marked by dissatisfaction about life and existence. Or if noticed he dismissed them as romantic, or skeptical or morbid or cynical. Now that he has developed or acquired (how exactly he may not know) the ability of noticing and appreciating or sort of understanding these other people and their similarity with him, he also, if fortune favours, finds (in persons or in stories or whatever) around him a rare few men who are better souls (and had successfully survived and solved the years of deep distress of this sort) and towards whom or to whose way of living he feels attracted. The way of life of these better souls is marked distinctly by a sort of satisfaction, peace and love. There is generated in him a

feeling of adoration and trust for these good souls and their way of life. We are not necessarily speaking of hermit, ascetic, spiritual recluse or sannyasins. These better souls may be even teachers or ordinary (outwardly as he finds) householders. But even as householder they are different from many. These better souls are also found to have the ability as well as readiness to feel for the former dissatisfied individual and help him (or anyone of his kind).

Even if our dissatisfied individual cannot find such other people he himself begins to search for the meaning and significance of life and world. In due course he comes to develop a fuller picture of a better life and due aspiration for it. One such projected life is the religious life which man wants to realize by entertaining certain belief and undertaking certain practices. Soon man also develops an idea of a being or person who lives a life which is completely perfect in every possible sense of the term. The life of such a being not only exemplifies everything that is good but also exemplifies every good in its fully realized state. This becomes the divine being or God.²⁷⁴ Now life that did not have any definite significance, direction or value comes to have all these but only in relation to God. Man came to believing that God (a certain supernatural being or force or whatever) wants man to be what he now aspires for. Man finds confirmation (which he might have earlier got in good measure when he met the satisfied few good souls around him in this very society) that both his earlier dissatisfaction and present decision – to change over to a different life – are legitimate and authentic. Those years of intense and excruciating suffering he had experienced prior to his coming to the realization of what true life is or

means, have not been wasted. He now knows the right life to live for attaining the goal and destination where complete fulfillment awaits him for sure. The socialist, the atheist or whoever fails to notice what a great transforming power and force religion is, says religion is a state of stupor. In moral and religious life there is no holiday, here man is active every moment. A religious man lives his life intensely, much more intensely than an ordinary man or even a socio-political activist. Such a life, even when it does not take a positive form of social service, makes man incapable of doing any harm to other men or to even animal or the environment. Authentically religious men know no violence and are living embodiment of peace and happiness. They are the recognized heroes of Indian culture. Through inculcating the ways of these people the 90% of scientists of Schlick would ensure and hasten to nearest approximation of Pragmatist ideal society marked by human happiness, and solidarity etc.

It is in this way some men in the past found meaning of life; some are searching for it today and some of them will do so in future. But what is the point of searching it anew? Some of those who reached the end of their religious quest have left for us the instructions so that each one of us can, following those instructions, reach that goal. Indeed today a man begins his life with all guidance easily available to him provided he seeks them. But he seeks them when he begins to feel that distinct kind of dissatisfaction about the given life (which the self styled intelligent and rational men of the world find morbid, abnormal and what not) on the one hand and urge for the projected life on the other. Sometime later the seeking and the sought for become more real than

what man got without seeking. It may as well be the case that man has been all these years following those instructions, practicing those actions and rituals mechanically. Religion was not a *living experience* with them. To turn the religion of law learnt from the books which contain all the information about what to do and why, into the religion of experience (they may not really be two incompatible sorts of religions they are perhaps necessarily connected stages of the same single religion) each man has to go through the similar experience of dissatisfaction, doubt, disbelief, puzzlement, all which innumerable people in the past went through successfully. Like their predecessors each new seeker will also reach the destination and testify to the truth and value of the official and formal religion as a step towards the religion of experience. Each man does not need to lay the road but each must travel to reach the destination at the end of the path already laid by some predecessors. Religion is not going to be born with him for the first time. It was already there but innumerable individuals came to have it authentically when they became aware of it. For every single individual seeker there must be some preceding seekers who reached the destination to assure us that the path is the right path. The realist adds that if even a single man reaches the hoped for destination following the path then independent of his reaching the destination the right path was there and the destination too. The only other alternative – that each man had personally verified the reality and the truth of the result and the method and laid the road is a liar and a deceiver or even himself deceived – can hardly be accepted in the absence of enough evidence and sound arguments. It is safe to say that the official formal religion, religion as public institution and personal experience are

mutually compatible and supporting. In the world there will always be leaders as well as seekers and aspirants needing guidance. Further the seeker today will be leader tomorrow.

The meaning and purpose of life now comes to consist in living according to the will of God. A religious man is one who thinks, speaks and acts in a way that is dictated or informed by the will of God. At certain point of time the beliefs and acts which are pleasing to God, are in accordance with God's will, came to be codified in the form of scripture. The scripture is the document of everything that is related to God-the beliefs he approves, actions He enjoins, relationship with Him which He likes man to have and so on. The scripture at once becomes both the source of religious beliefs and authority behind the duties of life. The scripture is the only authoritative source. Even the reasoning of the men of commitment, according to the realist philosopher, takes its cue from here. The scripture is the holy text containing the words of God the supreme divine Being.

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Can we make this account a little more concrete? Perhaps we can. Among many different factors and considerations that render man's life on earth a meaningless affair, devoid of all significance, and a tale told by an idiot, the most important is the inevitability of death. Death which is capable of turning into total insignificance all that man toils so hard to achieve in life came to be most feared. It is natural for man to want, dream or wish to defeat or overcome this enemy of all enemies. The fear of death and the hope or dream of defeating it – *mṛtyu bhaya* and *amṛtatva bhāvana* – become two basic motive forces of man's life, which directly or indirectly determines all that he thinks or does, though

rarely he is explicitly aware of this truth. If it was constant and explicit then this awareness of the inevitability of death could turn a man into an utter pessimist, it could even lead him to terminate his life. This however did not happen for many reasons. First men could manage to remain forgetful or only half aware of the inevitability of death and its consequences.²⁷⁵ Many contributory factors are there but they are sometimes known by their collective name ignorance. It covers common man's unquenchable lust for life, his inability to be discerning enough to know the deeper truth, the inbuilt power or self-deception etc. etc. But what about the few really discerning individuals who could not be deceived or self-deceived? Well they turn to religion, scripture and philosophy. So far as Hinduism is concerned all these three jointly and severally tell, and tell us convincingly, that to compensate for the fear of death, a fear which the realist admits to be real, there is a hope, hope that a way would be found out to solve the riddle of life. The riddle is that the life is created, it seems, so that it may be destroyed. Nothing can be more incomprehensible and irrational. The analysis of realist philosophy based on or compatible with religion or scripture, reveals that the utter irrationality of creating man (or life or the universe) for the purpose of destroying it could not be or need not be imputed to Nature, God or whatever it may be that created life (unless of course we have already turned a hardened pessimist).

Religion offers, perhaps even before philosophy, an account of life, a commentary on it, so to say. This account tells us that the emotion of fear of death is to create in man the positive urge to find or give meaning to life by utilizing all the resources he has – all his intelligence, feelings, emotions and effort; and help and guidance from his friends,

ancestors, gods and even God. The inevitability of death makes life valuable, every moment of it is to be spent in such a way that life, which in all its appearance is meaningless, can become meaningful. That deeper meaning and purpose of life, the true and ultimate nature of man, is to be found out over which death has no power. Religion bears this message of hope which in case of the discerning few and trusting majority compensates for the negative force of fear of death. It informs man for the first time that man is born not to die but to defeat death²⁷⁶ and discover that he is immortal; and life best spent is the life which is spent in search of the means whereby the so far imagined story or the rationalization, just sketched, can become a firm conviction and realization of the ultimate truth. Religion is the commentary of human life – a commentary which begins by accepting the experienced facts of life – its sorrows and sufferings, its frustrations and dismay, its worries and agonies – and then reveals the ultimate truth and value of life, even the value of these sufferings; it assures us of an eternal life marked by the deepest and most complete fulfillment.

The difficulty which one now encounters is how to be sure that this is not all imagination and make-belief. What assurance, if any, is there that all these words of hope and encouragement are true and backed by acceptable evidence? For a complete and fully satisfactory (according to our best judgment) answer we are to turn to or develop the sort of realist philosophy which we are trying to sketch. The realistic procedure man usually follows in such cases is that till he finds a fully developed theoretical account such as historical, scientific or philosophical, (or a combination of all of them), man constructs some speculative or even imaginary account for the time being, following

certain stated or assumed norms. Such an account is admitted to have heuristic value and is not wild imagination. Nonetheless such account has a sort of completeness about it; it describes or explains – accommodates or keeps room for – all the related matters or issues and within it each single factor acquires a sort of intelligibility and perhaps significance. The sort of philosophical reconstruction of the origin and meaning of religion just sketched is so far a short but holistic interpretation of life as a whole – birth and death, sufferings and hopes, journey and destination, liberty and duty, thought, feeling, emotion and volition; every aspect of life and experience is taken care of and woven together into a grand narrative, so to say.

To interpret life as a whole, in all its dimensions – personal and social, inner experiential and outward practical etc. — and bring out its significance is what no descriptive study like science or even history can achieve. It is achieved in religion, literature, art and philosophy. However, we rise to a higher level and enter into a different realm of experience and vision when we turn to philosophy. It is marked by deep insight, thorough analysis, astute thinking, rigorous proofs and all these with confident hope and positive approach. It accords reality and significance to both unity and diversity, phenomenal and transcendental, and natural and supernatural. It reconciles inner and the outer, private and public, and the material and spiritual orders of things and phenomena. In one comprehensive vision of life and the world it weaves together harmoniously the mundane and the divine, the rational and ‘mystical’, the legal and the emotional. It does not deny the facts of sorrows and sufferings as a spiritual monist does (in some particular sense though), it does not end there as a pessimist is

condemned to do; it does not rest satisfied with the utopia of the romantic and the dreamer nor does it offer man just an ideology to follow. It gives man a true and broad perspective which promises and fulfills the promise of providing rational justification and foundation to the beliefs and practices which define man's personal and cultural life in its totality. And in doing this it gives positive and deep meaning and value to itself, to man's philosophical enterprise. It encourages man to undertake heroically a long life of intense effort to transform himself and exert transforming influence on all around him.

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The account presented so far is likely to appear more literary than analytic. Besides it is extremely sketchy. It may be all right as a means of sensitizing the readers and provoke them to carry the project further in the positive way and produce a more analytic account or, in the negative way, produce a comprehensive critique exposing the present account as thoroughly as possible for all its defects and mistakes. We ourselves will discuss here one defect though there must be many more. It is important to note that our account so far does not keep any room for plurality of religions. In religion the "Other" has certain important role to play. Religious plurality is one form which this "Other" assumes. So what we propose to do is to restate or reformulate first our account of religion as such in terms of or with reference to various types of "other" involved in religious life and thought. Then in the next section we will give a short account of the origin of religious plurality.

No one should fear that the present account of religion and how men came to have it will be different from the preceding one in the

sense of being incompatible with that. Nor it will be just repetition of the earlier one. It is most likely that some will find this account a little richer and deeper. It utilizes the concept of 'other' and begins by distinguishing two of them which may be found to make their presence in the context of religion and religious experience as well as language and account of religion. There is on the one hand such a thing as 'other in religion' or the Other1, and on the other hand there is what may be called 'religious other' or Other2. We will later talk about one more type of other, the Other3 or better the O11. The Necessary context of the Other2 is plurality of religion. A Christian is the religious other of a Hindu and a Jew is a religious other of a Mohammedan, so on. Sometimes we take one religion, say Islam, the religious other of another religion, say Buddhism. Originally different major religions might have emerged in different parts of the globe. But today almost every society is multicultural and multi religious. A Hindu remains a religious other of a Muslim (the converse also largely holds) even when they speak the same language (as in Bangladesh) or had been the inhabitants of the same country and with the same Nationality till the other day (as in the case of India and Pakistan). Religious other in this sense becomes very important in the context of religious conflict in both religiously important and religiously unimportant senses. For in such context knowledge or awareness of O2 often determines the attitude and behaviour of a person (of one religion) in respect of some other persons in consideration of the different religion that they have. In case people are not sufficiently discerning, consideration of religious other overrides many important and more valid considerations of life and some really non-religious issues are confused as religious ones.

There is another context where the importance of O2 is far greater. It turns out to be one of the major factors which shape a religion. This fact is rarely given the importance and attention it deserves. It even provides a valid and religiously important criterion of divisions of religions of the world. Some religions are there which emerged with full and explicit awareness on their part or on the part of the concerned people of the presence of some O2. If we apply this principle to major religions of the world we find Hinduism falls on one side of the division and all other religions fall on the other side. There is no internal or external evidence that Hinduism developed with the explicit awareness of the presence of another religion. This explains some of the basic features of Hinduism in contrast to other major religions. Two of these features are first the absence in Hinduism of any provision for conversion (into Hinduism) and second Hinduism is the only religion which has no name.²⁷⁷ It is only in the light of the role O2 or the awareness of its presence plays that we can understand that absence of any provision of conversion is not an accidental feature of Hinduism. When a dissenting offshoot of a religion establishes itself as a separate religion, as it happened in case of Buddhism, explicit awareness of O2, in this case, Hinduism, is most important.²⁷⁸ A religion which emerges in this way is born with two or three major concerns. To find its separate identity is the first concern. A major and original part of its identity consists of course in its *difference* from its religious other or others – earlier religion or religions. Though difference is reciprocal the newly founded religion alone has this concern. The earlier one has already an established identity of its own to which the difference from the new religion can at best add a new dimension. But the identity of

the new religion consists so far only in its difference from certain another religion. Almost as a rule the new religion searches for and feels the need of some positive content with which to fill (the conception of self identity) its identity. As a first step towards that it turns its negative identity important by giving it a sort of positive feature. The new religion incorporates in its cult or creed some sort of reform agenda or critique of the old religion. The stance of reform gives new religion a sort of superiority or assumed superiority; it finds (discovers) something, some defects to rectify in its O2. So far it is or believes itself to be comparatively superior. Under certain circumstances this turns out to be a source of interfaith conflict. Every religion eventually comes to view its religious other as its critique and not necessarily a friendly critique.

Incidentally, this sort of awareness, or otherwise unconscious reasoning, is more popular in modern time and modernist culture. The concept of rationality in this culture is largely negative and destructive. Many modern writers whether Indian or alien almost invariably find as best, if not the only supporting, example of India's claim to the title of rational culture in the system of thought of the Cārvāka-s or Bauddhas.²⁷⁹ This should be deemed sufficient for the present to show that the awareness of O2 is a major factor in the shaping of certain religion, in fact majority of world religions. Islam developed not only in the presence of Judaism and Christianity but also with the explicit awareness of their presence. Even a casual reader of the Koran will feel the truth of this as he glances through the pages of the holy text. We will not discuss any more here of religious other of a certain religion or member of a certain religious group; we will only mention a few minor points before we pass on to discuss the 'other religion'. The first point is

that a new religion seeking self-identity is often obsessed by the desire to get its identity recognized or it is obsessed by the fear that its identity is being marginalized, threatened or lost. Such obsession, when it succeeds in overriding sober and critical reasoning and good sense, run the risk of turning its members apprehensive, over jealous, violent and fundamentalist in character and initiator of religious conflict. Such obsession is, it may be conceded, natural (though not necessary) to some extent at the time when a new religion starts its career in the presence of another well established religion. However often it happens that this original obsession becomes such a habit with certain religions that find it very difficult to completely come out of its militant nature. Certain temporary and contingent feature becomes essential and defining nature. The second point is that there is no logical necessity that religious other will be a member of a different religion or an anti-religious person or discipline of thought. This point gains importance in that it is closely associated with the truth that plurality of religions does not necessarily imply a condition of religious conflict. Though we are using the expression 'religious other' in such a sense that only another religion or member of another religion can be the religious other (in relation to some other religion or member of it), some may want to further extend the use of the concept or the expression. In the first place a member of a certain religion can be the religious other of an atheist or agnostic. Secondly a non-religious system like science can be regarded as religious other of certain particular religion or religion as such. In the context of conflict between science and religion science is the religious other in the sense of being the other of religion (as such). To distinguish our use of the term from such rather less important

extensions of it we preferred the term religious other instead of 'the other of religion'. The third point is that we may as well reiterate that it is not only theoretically possible but also there is as a matter of fact religion which developed without any awareness of the possibility or actuality of a pre-existing religion. Let us now pass over to O1 or the 'other *in* religion' which was largely adumbrated in our previous account of religion or man's coming to have religion.

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An account of religion may proceed from two different starting points. One may take as the basic factor God in terms of whom religion, ultimately everything that constitutes religion, is to be explained or an account of religion can be given. Who prefers to proceed in this way has one disadvantage. Normally he does not have any direct knowledge of God. The same is normally true about the people for whom the account is meant. There are difficulties in convincing people²⁸⁰ that God is just a theoretical term or is simple and obvious enough to play the role of an axiom or undefined term of a system. Often what these people do in the name of starting their account with God is that they start with God's words or Scripture. Scripture is with which every (religious) person begins. In case of a founded religion, its founder – the God incarnate or a person chosen by God – first hears the words of God. So even he cannot be said to begin really without scripture before him. According to the account of religion which begins with scripture religion tends to become primarily a formal religion or religion of law. Such a religion gives much importance to conformity to law or set norms, rituals, code of duties and so on. Religion tends to become more a formality than

something living. More rigid the requirement of external conformity to laws and norms poorer the religion becomes in terms of inner experience. Such realization as well as complaint can be traced to ancient Greek thinkers as we have noted earlier. In modern India majority of intellectuals have expressed the same opinion and further added that Hinduism or classical Hinduism became more formal and legal than experiential; outward conformity got the precedence over inner experience. Bankimchandra, Gandhi, Rabindranath all are of this opinion. They have expressed this opinion whenever they got the opportunity to do so.

Rabindranath, among many others, was once asked to write about his religion. He wrote a paper “The Religion of an Artist”. In this article while he was approvingly referring to nineteenth-twentieth century religious reform movement he writes about the sorry state of Hinduism which for him was enough justification for initiating a movement for the reform of it. He writes “Raja Rammohan Roy tried to reopen the channel of spiritual life which had been obstructed for many years by the sand and debris of creeds that were formal and materialistic, fixed in external practices lacking spiritual significance.” The request for a paper for the same volume was made to Gandhi and Gandhi contributed a one page article in response to the request.²⁸¹ Gandhi was also quite emphatic on the importance of inner experience even though he was all praise for Cow worship and *Varṇāśramadharma*.

We do not share the largely negative attitude of modern intellectuals to rituals and practices who take either an intellectual approach to religion, as Bankimchandra did²⁸², or an emotional-

devotional attitude to it, as the *Vaiṣṇava* and some other liberal Hindus appear to do. There is a third group of people who give great importance to spiritual practices of various forms of Yoga but not on practices prescribed in the Hindu scripture or hortatory literature. We do not find any necessary opposition between external conformity to prescribed practices and inner religio-spiritual feelings and experiences. For Manu explicitly says that significance of practices lies in that they make one eligible for receiving spiritual experience; they are the facilitators. Besides, as we perceive it, if emphasis on practices has the danger of making religion something mechanical, the over emphasis on experience or emotion can be dangerous also in another way. We may transform ourselves into such emotional beings that mislead themselves into thinking of having religious and spiritual experience while in fact they only imagine that they have such experience. This is easy as there is no external, formal, objective or public check. Religion is a matter of realistic discipline and objective experience and not romantic imagination or pseudo mysticism. Today almost everybody denounces religious practices which they call rituals and opt for experience instead. But the classical Hindu perception is that only they can have *authentic* religious and spiritual experience that had undergone long rigorous practice; the rest can only imagine that they had such experience. The realists are suspicious of claims of the pseudo mystic and the romantic people.

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Instead of making God the starting point we in our account start with the individual human being who is or can be religious, who needs

religion and for whom religion is created or revealed. The more familiar and concrete human situation should better be our starting point. An attempt to give an account of religion – how men came to have it – or understand it is more likely to succeed if it takes religious individual or religion seeking individual as more basic and prior compared to the otherwise more abstract phenomenon of religion. The priority in question is not necessarily in the historical sense for that will conflict with the fact and our belief that generally speaking a man is born in a religion rather than acquires it later. When we say a man is born in a religion we mean by religion an institution of established and shared beliefs and practices, doctrines and rituals. But a man comes to have religion as a personal culture only when he develops in him a certain sort of dissatisfaction, hopes, quests and so on. But such a man if not romantic or mystic but realist by temperament would again set himself in the safe and secure path of religious practices with firm hope and conviction. He continues his journey till he reaches the goal and to be sure he reaches it one day.

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The other *in* religion or O1 in terms of which we try to understand religion and sketch an account of it may be found to be no other than the individual man himself. Even before he knows the cause or nature of the dissatisfaction in question almost every man is dissatisfied with his present state or condition of being. One who feels, rightly or wrongly, completely or nearly completely satisfied with one's present state of being (as a social and family man etc. say), rarely authentically feels the need for religion. He may still have religion outwardly, and even that may be of quite some importance, but for our purpose we disregard it.

We are trying to understand how a man came to have religion without presupposing that he already has one; or we understand by religion that religion which he does not have as yet. We rather presuppose for our purpose that the man does not already have a religion and since that is not normally or actually possible we distinguish one's having a religion and one's having a religion authentically.

Anyway, we begin by admitting or assuming that human individuals are generally dissatisfied with their present state of being; and their life becomes a matter of care and concern. They are busy trying to remove the felt dissatisfaction and procuring satisfaction, usually in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion. Rarely but surely do some of them grow dissatisfied with the very way of tackling the dissatisfaction. Not that they are not able to remove some dissatisfactions but many more always remain to take care of. Ultimately they come to feel that life itself is a burden which has to be spent continuously anticipating or facing problems and ceaselessly attempting to solve them. What worth is living if this is all that life means? They come to question or doubt the value of life or leading a life they are living. This is the sort of dissatisfaction and not just the dissatisfaction of not being able to procure an automobile for personal use.

There is another, almost universal, source of dissatisfaction which is often said to be what turns man to religion. It is the inevitability of death. Nobody has experienced death, still death is regarded as a form of suffering for the very thought of it evokes a great sense of sorrow. Death of near and dear ones causes so much of pain and yet everyone has to go through such pain. It is no use saying that it is so common. For the poet has a good reply. He says 'My grief is common

that does not make my grief the less rather more'. Philosopher has his own logical and therapeutic reply. He says grief must be the result of ignorance, at least it is not the result of separation from our dear and deceased ones; had it been so our sorrow would increase with every passing day. In the Mahābhārata Yudhiṣṭhir found it most surprising that men behave as if he will not have to die even though he experiences every day men die around him. The implication is man's love for life is very deep though unreasonable. Yoga darśana has recognized fear of death (abhiniveśa) as a daily suffering.

More than ceaseless struggle with various other dissatisfactions, the phenomenon of death and fear of it make man feel that life is miserable. It has been noted in other ancient cultures like Greece that death or destruction is a riddle. How could a *being* become *nothing*? It is one of the most unintelligible things which reason fails to accept. The Greeks took the matter more abstractly; we are at present attending to the more human aspect of it. Inevitability of death makes life and all life's projects and purposes meaningless. This sense that we are to live a life which has no meaning creates greatest of all dissatisfactions. So far one of the most striking features of concrete human life and existence is that it is devoid of any meaning and one of the most fundamental experiences of life is the experience of spiritual dissatisfaction. If there were nothing to compensate for this then human race would have become extinct by now. It would not do to say that what compensates for the utter senselessness of life and the accompanying dissatisfaction is the deep rooted ignorance and lust for life. Men continue to live just because he cannot succeed in acquiring distaste for it, just as a habitual

drunkard continues to drink not for the hope of anything better but just because he cannot give it up.

The truth dawns on the discerning few among human individuals; they could see life could not have been created simply for the fun of destroying it. They find reason for having a firm hope and belief that a fulfilling state of being is definitely attainable through one's own effort, though perhaps not by it alone, to compensate for the present state of dissatisfaction. A man who attains such a state of mind is already set to have a religion. Religion in this sense is the quest of an unfulfilled man for his own self in a future state of fulfillment. This is his other self, a fulfilled man. So a man finds himself divided into three persons, a dissatisfied individual, a hopeful one toiling for fulfillment and a man in a satisfied and fulfilled state. The last is what we call the other in religion. All the three men into whom one finds himself divided are worldly. It is a worldly man who begins (we consider him from the stage when he comes to have the experience of dissatisfaction) with the experience of dissatisfaction and the disturbing sense of meaninglessness of life, then begins his quest for a fulfilled state of being on the firm conviction that such a state can be achieved. Some doubt whether the state of satisfaction or a satisfied man can be a worldly being, our answer based on the Hindu view, is decisively in the affirmative. The other *in* religion for us means then in the first place man's awareness of himself as other, that is to say, he himself in his transformed and future state of fulfillment. The pull of the O1 and/or the seeking of O1 is to our mind the heart of religion. Religion is a mode of living, primarily a life of activity, though this is bound to end in a state

of fulfillment when these activities would cease almost automatically. In this sense religion has a beginning and an end.

What happens to a man who finds or realizes his other self or self in the other state of being need not be gone into here. But it is necessary to be clear about, even if in barest outline, in which this fulfillment consists; what the 'self' gets in that state so that he feels satisfied. Most orthodox answer is that a man realizes in such a state the immediate communion with what is the complete embodiment of happiness and perfection. Some say it is God, some say it is Truth, still others say it is Love. Whatever it is, getting it man finds the fullest satisfaction of life. He gets something having got which he considers there is nothing greater to be had.²⁸³ But we prefer a more general description and would like to describe this state as the state of being of a man where he meets his own satisfied and hitherto projected self. The original and earlier dissatisfied man has undergone great transformation. This transformation manifests itself in the way he lives, speaks, acts and so on. Religion is a great transforming force. This state of fulfillment is not only emotionally satisfying, it is not that he is only happy. It is also intellectually satisfying. Man now understands the meaning of life, of whole of life, of all his past suffering and trouble, hopes fulfilled and successes denied. He even understands why he had to be born to suffer and die – the original riddle of life. Only after meeting his satisfied being or soul man comes to realize the value of all the dissatisfaction, troubles and turmoil of life he had gone through and almost every man goes through. Those were meant to evoke the necessary search for this state of being. A Christian finds life's suffering

meaningful for this alone brings him closer to God.²⁸⁴ God has not created life senselessly for destroying it. He created man so that he can fulfill the mission which has been pending so long, from the time God created this universe or from the beginning-less past.

At the long last, after all due sufferings of life, man realizes the true nature and purpose of life and for which it is created. The dissatisfaction that leads man towards religion is marked with an awareness of the incompleteness and essential imperfection of the world. Even if one gets all the best the world can afford one will not be satisfied²⁸⁵ till he can conquer death or get something permanent. The fear of death is transcended only in the last death.²⁸⁶ And the agony of unfulfilled life can be finally transcended when one could transcend the desire for fulfillment itself either by achieving or experiencing the fulfillment or, what comes to the same thing, by finally getting rid of the very seeking itself – the seeking of fulfillment.

The meaning and purpose of life, its true goal and true path, came to be discovered either in the grand spiritual intuition of the R̄sis or in course of sustained analytical and critical philosophical inquiry. The realist philosophy of the matter just sketched combines complete trust in the intuition and full commitment to analysis and reasoning. The former did not allow this philosophy to become mere exercise in technical sophistication for its own sake without any substantive core or human concern. It remained deeply concerned with human happiness. This concern is fully realistic as it is informed not only by the experience of suffering but also by complete acceptance of its reality. At the same time the commitment to subjecting the intuition to thorough analysis and sustained critical examination did not allow man's intuition of the

deepest concern to turn out to be mere poetic imagination or pseudo-mystical self deception.

One question still remains. Does man get any help and guidance from any external in the sense non-human source? The experience of the final fulfillment or getting rid of the seeking we spoke above is achieved *in time*. This is a state of a being of who was earlier in another state in which he inevitably experienced sorrows and dissatisfaction.²⁸⁷ The theists admit another being who is as much central to religion as O1. Let us call Him O11, the second other *in* religion. The first other in religion O1, is common to all religions alike the second other in religion is to be found only in theism. Non-theistic religion believes that a man solely by his own effort, depending only on his *own* resources – all the resources, the intellectual, emotional, volitional all – sets himself on the long and arduous journey, keeps up his courage through all occasional setbacks and bouts of doubts and disbeliefs and finally reaches his goal, the fulfillment, his own self in a state of ‘permanent’ fulfillment. In religion man is a lone seeker, lone traveler. He is not even a social man. He is a hermit or a sannyāsin. He lives in isolation (*vivikta deśasevi*) and keeps no company (*aratirjanasamsadi*).²⁸⁸

The theistic religion does not deny necessarily the possibility of lone traveler reaching his destination. But it believes in two things. According to theism quite independent of our knowing or believing there is another Being, the same for all, Who is helping every religious seeker even without his knowledge. But man comes to be aware of Him only when he finds himself in urgent need of His help and seeks it. The lone heroic seeker of the non-theistic religion finds O1 and establishes communion with it. But he was never alone. Whether man sought Him

or not, felt the need for Him or not O11 was always there with His loving care and compassionate guidance for man. Since He is objectively there for all and unconditionally, the seekers of non-theistic and theistic religion are equally helped by O11. But the less heroic social men and common householders among the seekers and realists among the theoreticians of religion explicitly admits the existence of O11. Anyway, O11 is central in our account of religion. Many think that O11 is just an explanatory hypothesis. For theism it is a real and personal Being. If O11 was not there as an actual and concrete embodiment of the eternal fulfillment already realized, if man could not foresee in the perfect O11 the other of the essentially imperfect world, an eternally fulfilled being whose fulfillment is not achieved in time, he could not perhaps sustain himself in his long and torturous journey called religious life. On the other hand unless the call was from such a wholly perfect Being as O11, man could hardly stake all the good and beautiful things of the world and worldly life (where there are evils and sufferings also to be sure) for an uncertain future state the reality of which very few could testify. For an imaginary future, mere utopia, however great, men, really discerning men, could not have sacrificed, as they evidently did down the ages, the whole world – our known world which still gives us food to eat, water to drink and air to breathe besides giving us the pleasures of family and company of friends and what not. In short the direct communion with God, the destination of the journey called religion, the goal of human life, is actually a communion between man's O1 with O11. Both are real. But man in his worldly existence remains forgetful of both. Then a time comes when frustrated by the unsolved riddle of life and enamored by O11, not met as yet but only heard about, man set out to meet his O1.

Then by using up all his own resources and the help and guidance provided by O11 in his infinite kindness and compassion, man eventually meets his O1. Thereafter the man or his O1 remains totally absorbed in that state of fulfillment or in constant direct communion with O11 or, occasionally overtaken by his disposition to serve mankind, takes up the task of guiding men, an active role of the teacher of mankind.

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Does our account have place for plurality of religions which not only makes interfaith conflict possible but also gives scope and meaning to various policies, programme and projects of religious harmony and unity etc. Even when he gives due importance to religious experience a realist is generally not in favour of mystical and romantic approach to religion. The official religion – religion consisting or manifesting itself in the codified beliefs and practices, in scripture, – is of great importance to him as it ensures optimal objectivity of religion. Every organized religion feels the need of certain authority to enforce discipline and uniformity in the (religious) beliefs and practices of the people of the community. And it is religion in this sense which constitutes identity of a people or community. In institutionalized religions there is, in addition to scriptures, authorized person (as in Islam) or official body like Church to interpret the scripture. In Hinduism there is scripture²⁸⁹ but not strictly any formal body of interpreters. Only criterion laid down in the tradition is that interpretation only by the learned and according to rules evolved for the purpose of interpreting scripture²⁹⁰ will have, in theory, precedence over other interpretations, if any.

Plurality of faiths, religiously important and relevant differences between religions or religious communities, can be easily explained in

terms of difference of respective scriptures, around which religious communities evolved and got organized, and certain attitude to the respective scriptures in which the religious identity of the community mainly consists. So far as ordinary men are concerned it is normal etiquette as well as social expediency not to show disrespect to the Scripture of a different religious community. But one is not bound, in certain definite sense, by the values and duties prescribed therein. We will soon see the difference between accepting what is enjoined in a scripture and accepting because it is enjoined in the scripture. Hindu identity is clearly an identity of believers in the Hindu scripture. This people were known as *āstika* even before the word Hindu was coined. Intra-faith plurality, religiously important and relevant differences between different sects of a single religion, however, largely depends on several principles of which the most authentic and important one is the difference of interpretation of the scripture. So far as the principle of difference makes essential reference to scriptures the interfaith difference is explained in terms of having different scriptures and intra-faith differences in terms of differences in the interpretation of the same and shared scripture. Not very apt but easily understandable and familiar example of intra-faith plurality of religions due to difference in the interpretation of scripture is the example of non-dualist and dualists among the *āstika-s*. The other example from India would be differences among sects of Buddhism based on different interpretations of Buddhavacana (words of Buddha). It is to be remarked that for the *nāstika* Bauddha-s, Buddha vacana is the scripture whereas for the *āstika* Hindus, the Veda in its comprehensive sense²⁹¹ is the scripture.²⁹² One may as well say that Bauddhas are *āstikas* in respect of Buddha

vacana but nāstika in relation to the Veda. There are many such complications which we cannot address here. Just to cite one example, take the difference between the Sikh-s and the Hindus. Should it count as interfaith difference or intra-faith difference?

We have repeatedly contended that in India Buddhism is not a tradition *parallel* to Hinduism; it is a dissenting offshoot of Hinduism.²⁹³ If this is so then the difference is intra-faith. But Bauddha-s do not offer any new interpretation of the Veda but repudiate the Veda. So a slightly different principle is involved here. All the basic ideas and contents of what is called Buddhism as a distinct religion – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, *ahimsā*, *karuṇa*, *Śramaṇa* etc. – can be traced to and easily found in the Veda or the Vaidika literature. Major difference between Hinduism and Buddhism is said to be over *ahimsā* or non-violence which is claimed to be the second most important point of difference between these two systems of religion. The point to note first is that the Jaina-s are perhaps more strict practitioners of *ahimsā* than even the Bauddhas. Secondly Hinduism has from the time of the Veda explicitly forbidden *himsā*. The question is often raised how they could allow then ritual killing or *himsā* in some sacrificial rites. There is a vast literature on the subject in Hinduism which explains and defends the special injunction that is *supposed* to enjoin *himsā* in the sense of ritual killing. We find no response from the Bauddha-s to these defenses or better exposition of injunction that enjoins in some rituals killing of some animals. The Bauddha-s wanted to build an identity and they thought that this could be done by emphasizing their stand on *ahimsā* (perhaps in the limited sense of disallowing ritual killing of animals, for that is the only

difference with the Hindus who otherwise are explicitly against *himsā*. The face and image of Buddhism became intimately associated with the cult of a *ahimsā*. But theoretically and morally this is a very poor principle to distinguish Buddhism from Hinduism. We, therefore, cannot consider this as the religiously important difference or principle of such difference, when the traditions to be distinguished are Hinduism and Buddhism. Not only it cannot distinguish Buddhism from either Hinduism or Jainism it can hardly distinguish Buddhism from any religion. Hardly one will find a scripture which prescribes *himsā* and is so interpreted by the authorized interpreters of the scripture. It might be said from the side of the Bauddha-s that the principle of difference is not *ahimsā* but ritual killing which Hinduism accepts and practices but Buddhism denounces. The answer to this possible defense has already been given. One more viable principle is whether a religion admits God or not. On this score Buddhism is said to differ from Hinduism as the latter is a theistic system whereas the former is a non-theistic religion. But the idea of a non-theistic religion as distinct from morality is not clear and non-theistic religious traditions are not common.²⁹⁴

One can understand Buddhism in this way. Admitting *ahimsā* as the great and core value on the authority of life and teaching of Buddha is vastly different from accepting the same on the authority of the Veda. It thus boils down to the attitude to the Scripture. Buddhists do not hold in high esteem the Veda and seem to place Buddhavacana above the Veda.²⁹⁵ The Hindus do just the opposite. The issue turns out to be more epistemological than religious but for the reference involved to scripture. We cannot enter into it here. But realist philosophy of the

Hindus has exposed 'epistemological and logical weakness of the Bauddha position adequately. Spirited defences from the side of the Bauddhas are extant also. Anyway, apart from scripture related principle of religious plurality we have content related principle of plurality. One, though not the only, possible example of such difference is some forms of theism and non-theistic religion.

In actual practice one more socially effective principle of intra-faith religious plurality is the principle of object or person of immediate allegiance. This is more applicable in the Āstika culture of India which is a peculiar combination of monotheism and polytheism. Āstika-s are generally theist and God is the highest object of adoration and highest authority. He is highest but not experientially nearest or immediate or direct for most of us. Within Hinduism there is provision of religious authority who are less than or equal to God; they are the incarnations of God. God's incarnation or *avatāra* are very rare and make their appearance only on rare occasions. There is another religious institution, the institution of Gurus.²⁹⁶ These authorities or gurus enjoy a very high position in the Hindu society. The conception of guru as direct teacher and guide is as old as the Veda. Guru performs certain prescribed rite to initiate a student to dharma or whatever by virtue of which that individual becomes his *śiṣya* or disciple. While relation of the religious aspirant or *śiṣya* to his (immediate and human) guru is direct, guru is in theory God himself. Whereas God is one according to the Hindus there is no limit to the number of gurus at any given point of time; and they are different for different individuals. In theory again all these human gurus are embodiment of or representative of one single guru just in the sense all deities are the manifestation of one single God.

For, ultimately only God is the guru. Similarly there is no limit to the number of śiṣya-s of a Guru. So around a single individual in the form of a guru there are many individuals who stand in close relation to each other by their common bond of adoration and devotion to the same guru. In this way many smaller religious sects or sub-sects are developed which are not necessarily in the most friendly or peaceful relations with one another. Sometimes these guru-s also become interpreters of the scripture.

The institution of Guru is being much abused by people these days. Increasing number of men unfit for the position are posing as Guru and by and large each one of them finds increasing number of credulous śiṣya-s who in other spheres of life are intelligent, rational and discerning. This explains why hardly one such sect survives without split even one generation after its Guru leaves his body. The infighting among the śiṣya-s of any single Guru has become a rule and is a matter of common knowledge. The principles on which the splits occur are hardly ever religious. So difference among such groups is not religiously important or even religious.

It appears that the most basic and religiously most important principle of plurality of religions is the difference of scripture and, next, the difference of interpretation of any single Scripture. So far as the first is concerned people fail to understand or accept that God – one and the same God – would give us scriptures (supposing that all the scriptures are reveled) with significantly if not widely different form and content and also through different methods of transmission. This again has some epistemological implications which we ignore here. Things will be

easier to understand if we consider that God in His infinite wisdom knew which community of people at what time needed what sort of religious guidance. The problem would have been more difficult if God revealed religious truth and knowledge at the same time for the same people in the form of different scriptures. What is important for a realist philosopher and which he emphasizes is that it does not seem that in the eye of God there was no difference among men. He gave every community of people scripture in the language of that community. It does not seem to be the way of God to treat people all alike. But the best future and fulfillment is the same for all people and, in the language of Pascal, this is to find God, God realization.

Another principle of difference which is rarely noticed outside the circle of philosophers is the conception of God. We are not talking for the moment about the differences of polytheism and monotheism on the supposed principle of the difference regarding number of God admitted in a religion. There is no religion in which there is more than one God. In theory at least God is one. But monotheists are prone to give a twist to this universal truth knowingly or unknowingly. God is one and the monotheist worships that God. From this the historical monotheists often come to believe that the God they worship is the only God. Who does not believe in their God – God they worship – is a non-believer. This is one of the most effective principle that generated religious other. This is also one of the principal sources of religious coercion and conflict.

Notes and References

¹ See Tagore 1936 p.1.

² It was the National Education Movement which was spearheaded in Bengal by The National Council of Education. Rabindranath inaugurated this institution. Among the celebrated personalities associated with or even at the helm of this movement and the Institution include Aurobindo Ghosh (later Sri Aurobindo) and Satish Chandra Mukherjee.

³ See author's 1995 article.

⁴ See Bhattacharya K. C. 1930.

⁵ It is generally believed that there was an older movement, the Bhakti movement, which brought decisive challenge to Hinduism or conventional Hinduism. We have discussed elsewhere that there is reason to doubt whether there was any such thing as Bhakti movement. But that is another matter.

⁶ Bhattacharyya G. (Ed.) 1983 the Editor's Introduction p.xvii.

⁷ It will be wrong to suggest that the foreign missionaries themselves were actually or acutely aware of the difference between the Hinduism being practiced at the time and the Hinduism as it was in itself. This distinction was rather sharply drawn by Indian reformers of Hinduism in response to the criticisms of Hinduism by the over jealous foreign missionaries and their ardent, perhaps blind, Hindu followers.

⁸ Later induction by Keshab Chandra Sen of kīrtan or Vaiṣnava kīrtan into Brāhmaṇadharma of his preference shows some shift from pure or greater intellectualism to devotionalism. Such shift was most visible and decisive in case of Shri Bijoykrishna Goswami. Incidentally, Pascal is said to have once remarked that the heart has its own reason which reason does not understand.

⁹ Nationalism in the standard sense was yet to develop. The leaders of the time had no clear understanding or unanimity as to the true nature and meaning of nationalism till at least the first decade of the twentieth century or even later. It will be found both interesting and instructive to compare and contrast the views of men like Bankimchandra, Rabindranath, Gandhi, Tilak and the like on nationalism and related matters. Incidentally, there was no unanimity about the idea of national university during the national educational movement. There was great controversy on the point by men like Aurobindo and Anne Besant and others. At this stage nationalism was little more than a sense of national and cultural dignity.

¹⁰ This statement is oversimplified on many counts. The actual situation was much more complicated. On one hand some early missionaries were aggressive and intemperate compared to some later people who were more sophisticated and shrewd and about whom we will discuss later. Secondly the idea of nationalism was yet to be formed and become popular.

¹¹ This critique was originally a combination of the internalized form of basically alien criticisms and the willing acceptance of the standard of

scientific rationality of modern Europe on the part of the leaders of the reform movement.

¹² There was a controversy about what was to be understood by the pristine and pure form of Hinduism. Is it the Hinduism of the earliest phase of the Vaidika period or the latest phase of it. But there was a sort of unanimity about the position that the Hinduism of post Vaidika medieval period just preceding what is called the Bhakti movement was aberration of Hinduism proper.

¹³ We have discussed elsewhere how faulty is this way of sharply distinguishing the Veda from the Upaniṣad. The traditional scholars who are in a position to know do not draw such distinction. They deny any essential thematic or temporal division between the Vaidika age and the Upanisadic age. The view of the Veda and the Upaniṣad of the modern Indians is borrowed from scholars of alien culture and belongs to the earlier form of orientalist construction of India.

¹⁴ They are internal critics only in appearance for both their motivation and criticisms were derived more from their acquaintance with non-Indian thoughts and cultures than from their acquaintance with or acceptance of the views and approaches of indigenous scholars of India with regard to the Veda and Hinduism.

¹⁵ We will show that some great thinkers of pre-Semitic Greece did the same thing. Some of them occasionally offered some justification for their doing so which merits serious consideration.

¹⁶ Ramakrishna Paramahāṁsa was such a personality.

¹⁷ See Amalendu Tripathi, Renaissance etc. in Bengali p.47. During the renaissance the reformers sought to craft new religion or new version of religion on the basis of independent reason, selective use of scripture and scriptural literature and modern interpretation of these. Though in this they were all the same yet there were many significant differences between leaders of religious movements such as Rammohan, Bankimchandra, Devendranath, Keshabchandra, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and others. See also Sibnath Śāstri, *Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (in Bengali), (ed. Baridbaran Ghosh) New Age Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2007 (1904)

¹⁸ Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay is one of the best examples. However there was no effective regular programme of disseminating these new ideas to larger section of people who were not readers of these publications.

¹⁹ To mention the name of some of them at random, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Sri Aurobindo on the one hand and Mr Rakhal Das Nyāyaratna, Phanibhusan Tarkavāgīśa, Yogendranath Tarkasāṁkhyavedāntatīrtha, Sashisekhar Sanyal, Paramācārya Chandraśekharendra Sarasvati, Gopinath Kaviraj, and Madhusudan Ojha on the other.

²⁰ Perhaps Debendranath Thakur (Tagore).

²¹ Keshabchandra for example, see Durgadas Basu.

²² Bijaykrishna Goswami.

²³ In the Mahābhārata it was the daityas who brought miseries to religion or the practitioners of it.

²⁴ The article “The Plight of Man without god” by the author was much later published in the journal, Modern Review Vol. CXXI, No. 4, 1967.

²⁵ They rarely discuss such questions as whether the current conception of science is to be changed or in which direction it should change if it is to be compatible with man’s belief and practice of religion.

²⁶ A number of scientists have recently written about how they find Vaiṣṇavism and the teachings of the Bhāgavata are also close to science.

²⁷ Liberal Hinduism creates an impression that the only or the only second representative philosophy of India is Vedānta, that India, teachings is the unity of dharma and the unity of mankind. They simply ignore the criterion that the basic view of Indian culture must be common to all sections of laity and literati of it. Such a view is men are essentially born different. They repeatedly refer to the saying ‘Ekam sat viprāḥ vaduhdā badanti’, as if the dualist and realist systems of thought were unaware of this saying. We have discussed some of these points in our contribution (unpublished) to the international seminar on Human Unity: Its Past record and Present prospect.

²⁸ Among many others the liberal Hindus or certain section of it hold this opinion.

²⁹ See Stepanyants 2010 p.252.

³⁰ Kant actually said this in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

³¹ The Mahābhārata.

³² This book is primarily based on the eight lectures the author delivered at the University of Calcutta in November 2012. In the lectures the problem of reconversion could not be discussed due to want of time.

³³ Some philosophers are likely to disagree. Thinkers like Quine are of the opinion Sophia may be philosophia never.

³⁴ Cf. Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* and Nelson's *On The New Frontiers of Genetics and Religion*.

³⁵ Cf. Vora Niru p. 34.

³⁶ One aspect of the metaphysical realism of this school we earlier expounded in the work Mukhopadhyay P. K. 1984 and another aspect of the theory of language and meaning in the book Mukhopadhyay 1990.

³⁷ Cf. Bhattacharya 1989 p.146.

³⁸ We have discussed it on many occasions particularly in the paper "Sense and Relevance of Philosophy".

³⁹ For some relevant programmes and information one may consult Nelson 1994.

⁴⁰ Some Indian scientists are also religious in the personal belief and practice but very few of them, particularly who are based in India, writes about religion or speak publicly about it.

⁴¹ *Comparative Religion* by Bouquet, for example.

⁴² When originally presented in Seminars some of our papers had as title Parallel Traditions of thinking etc. Though when published this was often changed.

⁴³ See author's article "The Availability of Ethics in India". There are many such instances.

⁴⁴ Maschmann 2002 P.73,

⁴⁵ See author's article "The Impact of Ramakrishna's Ideas," 2013.

⁴⁶ The possibility or actuality of a man having multiple religions, just as there are multi religious societies, is a complicated issue. We know of persons who claim to have more than one religion. They seem to be hardly aware of various issues involved in such claims.

⁴⁷ In fact scholars are divided in their opinion about whether liberal Hinduism is intolerant or liberal. See Elkman 2007.

⁴⁸ We have personally heard M. S. Srinivas being charged of bias because he was a Brahmin.

⁴⁹ Though rare sometimes two such persons may find themselves engaged in debate and the debate also ends successfully. For such a debate between Satishchandra Mukherjee and the Dr. Macdonell see Mukherjee, H. 200 pp. 342-43.

⁵⁰ Personally we are very skeptical or even opposed to all sorts of reform proposal. We have great regard for the attitude in this regard of persons like Prof. K. C. Bhattacharya. When we speak of reform what we mean is that reform be affected in our ideas of our own religion. For example it may be seen that popular attitude to the Veda needs to be reformed

and classical view is to be revived. So reform should not automatically be understood as reform of the classical religion.

⁵¹ Actually explanations of the provision in question are almost as old as the provision itself. Some modern scholars belonging to the group of traditional Hindus or the group of modern traditionalists draw our attention to these explanations which the critics often deliberately and conveniently ignore or suppress.

⁵² It may not be so easy to decide and judge. Certain section of people of the world may think that the ethico-religious duty of protecting one's own religion or the religion one believes to be good and superior may conflict with the duty of non-violence ordinarily understood. Even apart from this common sense understanding of violence and non-violence is sometimes a hindrance than help in understanding religious provision of violence.

⁵³ The extant literature of the Hindus on this subject critically examining the compatibility between the provision of animal killing with the universal negative injunction that no harm should be done to anyone or anything is generally ignored by the critics. This goes against both the criteria of objectivity and authenticity.

⁵⁴ Cf. author's unpublished paper.

⁵⁵ The recurrences in the past of the idea of universal religion in some form or other have been noticed. But there was nothing comparable to the systematic and enthusiastic propagation of a doctrine of universal religion of the type we notice among the liberal Hindus of today.

⁵⁶ Maxmuller for example used to believe this though he had great admiration for Hindu spiritual and literary culture.

⁵⁷ See Vora Niru 1999.

⁵⁸ Ramakrishna's patha or Sikh panth.

⁵⁹ We will discuss later why there are different religions at all.

⁶⁰ See Elkman 2007.

⁶¹ We have shown elsewhere (see Ramakrishna paper), following Tolstoy, that perhaps seeking God or the supreme principle, call it God or Truth, is what is common in all religions. Universal religion thus reduces to God seeking. It is a very thin idea of religion and further differences erupt almost immediately over the issue what constitutes God seeking. Those who prefer emotional or devotional approach will return a different answer to the question than what an intellectualist is expected to return. Alternatively the account of religious worship offered by a great religious devotee, in his capacity as a critical philosopher is unlikely to be accepted by most of the *bhaktivadins*. The philosopher (Udayanācārya) says (in his *Nyāyakusumānjaliḥ*) that the critical examination of proofs of God is religious worship of upasana.

⁶² Cf. Kostyuchenko 2010.

⁶³ For example Halbfabss is not convinced. It is another matter whether every one considers Halbfass to be right in this or not. See Elkman 2007.

⁶⁴ It is too fine for while developing or proposing a certain criterion of comparative assessment the philosophers themselves need to test if it is

too restrictive or over permissive and this can be done only in terms of if the criterion *applies* or not to different actual cases or rreligions.

⁶⁵ It is not confined only to the critics of Hinduism in India such as the Cārvāka. It is also the characteristic of the people who the Cārvākas criticize.

⁶⁶ We have written about it in our article in Bengali , “Viṁśaśatake Bāṅgālir Darśancarcā” in *Parikatha* 2001.

⁶⁷ Chakravarti Sadananda, “Ācāryam mām vijāñīyāt” *Pather Alo*, May-July 1991, Calcutta p.96.

⁶⁸ Mukherjee, Haridas et al., 2000.

⁶⁹ He however is not known to have ever preached with missionary zeal that Hinduism or Vedānta was or was the only universal religion.

⁷⁰ . See Niru Vora.

⁷¹ Vivekananda, Haraprasad Shastri, Gopinath Kaviraj, Gopinath Bhattacharya, and Gandhi are some of these men. all are unanimous on this point. All the major ideas of Buddhism are to be found in Hinduism. However, Buddhists will accept certain truths and values to be found in the Vaidika literature not because they are in the Veda-s or spoken by God but because they are recommended or enjoined by the enlightened. Hindus also accept the authority of ṛṣis though ultimately in matter religion and morality they refer to God as the only authority.

⁷² Suggested by the writings of men like Amartya Sen.

⁷³ Paramācārya Chandraśekharendra Sarasvati 1996 pp.27-28. See also Elkman 2007.

⁷⁴ Kant 1960 pp.142-43.

⁷⁵ The origin and nature of this idea as well as the purpose it serves are matters which need more discussion than has been possible till date.

⁷⁶ Vyāsa had actually sought forgiveness for three such ‘mistakes’ or injustices done to God. See the Bhāgavat.

⁷⁷ As already shown in contrast to practitioners of standard comparative religion or men like Amartya Sen, Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya, Mm. Gopinath Kaviraj, Ksitimohan Sen, Gandhi and others have explicitly said Buddhism and Jainism are not independent religious traditions parallel to Hinduism but these are either not different from Hinduism or are only dissenting offshoots of Hinduism. We have formulated and discussed elsewhere some necessary principle and consideration which substantiate the latter view.

⁷⁸ We however think that the legitimacy of the category of bhakti movement is doubtful. See Mukhopadhyay Lectures on the teachings of Sri Caitanya.

⁷⁹ See Sen Kstimohan2008 p.91.

⁸⁰ Cf. Swarup Ram 1992.

⁸¹ We discussed this in the Preface.

⁸² K. S. Murty *Vedic Hermeneutics*.

⁸³ Mm. Pandit Yogendranath Bagchi contributed enormously to this field of scholarship.

⁸⁴ Bhattacharya 1989 p. 219.

⁸⁵ See Mukhopadhyay 2009.

⁸⁶ If it is felt to be equally pressing in most of the societies all over the world the reason is these societies have undergone transformation under the impact of the European model.

⁸⁷ Barton Encyclopedia p.381.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Incidentally, some hold that in the “multi cultural Indian (Hindu) society” the Persis are among the most peaceful community.

⁹⁰ Bhattacharya Gopinath1989 p. 152.

⁹¹ One may accuse us of privileging dualists and pluralists. To an extent it is true. We will explain and defend this stance later.

⁹² The emphasis is necessary for Hinduism is also monotheistic.

⁹³ See reference to Halbfass’s view about the doctrine of universal religion of some modern liberal Hindus in the paper by Elkman.

⁹⁴ Cf. Evangelou.

⁹⁵ See Amartya sen *The Argumentative Indian*, Penguin Books, 2005 particularly Chapter 16.

⁹⁶ Barton, Ency p. 381 Only a few line below the same scholar admits that the Semite could not develop a mature culture because of the nature of their difficult living condition in desert atmosphere.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ We critically examined this claim in one of our papers. See Mukhopadhyay 1995.

⁹⁹ Farnell p.425.

¹⁰⁰ See Farnell, L. R., article "Greek, Greek Religion" in Encycl. P.415.

¹⁰¹ Putting matters in this way manifests a common modernist bias which is familiar but about which we are not only acutely and explicitly aware but also unconvinced.

¹⁰² Ibid emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Ibid p. 415 The author also refers to Farnell.

¹⁰⁴ But the sort of solution and reconciliation invented by the Hindus is unknown anywhere. Though a sort of life after death or even predestination was not wholly unknown to them yet the solution worked out by the Hindus could not be found by others.

¹⁰⁵ Farnell p.417.

¹⁰⁶ A single over arching principle with maximum explanatory power is the logical demand in the theoretical realm such as philosophy or science. But in the practical field of religion there is a great demand of a personal God. A religion with a personal God seems to be religiously most satisfying.

¹⁰⁷ Could we take this as one of the messages of Rabindranatha's Acalāyatana!

¹⁰⁸ Practical Vedānta! Great religious leaders who tasted the depth and intensity of the personal religion willingly want to die to the world to live within. Even Aristotle who was no mystic recommended, as Farnell noted, "the secluded and contemplative life". Ency. Greek Religion p.416. The Gītā recommends vivikta deśasevitva aratirjansamsadi.

¹⁰⁹ Farnell, L. R., "Greek Religion", Encycl, p.416

¹¹⁰ See Farnell p.417.

¹¹¹ Ibid p.417.

¹¹² It is a religious movement which began in the 16th century as an attempt to reform the doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The movement resulted in the separation from the Roman Catholic Church and creation of Protestant Church.

¹¹³ Ibid p.417.

¹¹⁴ Ibid p.420.

¹¹⁵ Bhattacharya Gopinath, "Varieties of Religious Discipline" in Bhattacharya Gopinath 1989 pp.217-223 Kṣitimohan Sen's book is of a different kind nonetheless it provides brief account of many Asian religions.

¹¹⁶ We will return to it when discussing challenge to religion from socialist ideology.

¹¹⁷ Both these groups at least the first group contrasts ritualism with spiritualism (spirituality). See Dandekar 1967.

¹¹⁸ A great issue is made out of this. For the Hindus dharma is believed to be mainly rituals. But the usual list of general or varṇa-specific or āśrama specific dharmas hardly include rituals. Besides the long list of forty eight rituals does not fail to include at least eight ātmaguṇa-s.

¹¹⁹ Why it does not is hardly ever explained convincingly. Lots have been written to *claim* that unlike Hinduism, Vedānta or Buddhism is

compatible with science. But hardly the point is convincingly explained or proved.

¹²⁰ Cf. Mukhopadhyay 1992.

¹²¹ See the beginning of the chapter on Proofs and Properties of God below.

¹²² Cf. Author's unpublished contribution to the seminar on Rabindranath and universal religion.

¹²³ Some think or appear to think that God created only one religion, plurality or religions is created by men and it is related to the issue of distinctive identity and its different ways of expression – sometimes aggressively. Gandhi appears to think that it is man's imperfection that is responsible for different and conflicting religions. Some others suggest plurality of religion is the result of our failing to distinguish religion proper from what are not religion in this sense but somehow related to it.

¹²⁴ For example many such statements can be found in the Koran. To cite one example at random a difference between Judaism and Christianity vis-à-vis Islam (in addition to many violent statements about the non-believers in Islam) has been stated in the Sura 5, Para 7, Ayat 82.

¹²⁵ Some suspect on this ground that all texts that go by that name are not really God revealed Scriptures. Either all the texts are not fit to be taken as Scripture or he who revealed them could not really be God.

¹²⁶ We need to note however that these expressions do not mean exactly the same in every system of religion. See Mukhopadhyay, ‘Does Time Have a Beginning?’ 2009.

¹²⁷ Cf. Śāṅkarācārya’s commentary on the Brhmaśūtra 3.2.15.

¹²⁸ Nor do we have enough evidence to conclude that they or all of them were founded religion in the sense in which Buddhism or Jainism is.

¹²⁹ Is it also envisaged that another particular point of time they may need to leave it or transcend it?

¹³⁰ (a) “Religious Freedom” in Ram Swarup 1982 . This passage is from “a speech [delivered] before a Seminar on Religious Freedom, held on July 11, 1978, in New Delhi, at the request of eighty-five Unitarian Christians from the U.S.A. and Europe on a visit to India. The author was requested to present the Hindu point of view.” (b) emphasis added by us to draw attention to Gandhi’s views and writings on this point of how social service was used as bait to convert Hindus to Christianity.

¹³¹ We have discussed elsewhere the question whether a man can convert to a religion just because *he* chooses to do so or his converting is also contingent upon the condition of *free acceptance* or approval by the religious tradition in question.

¹³² Cf. Rudolph and Rudolph 1967 p.139f.

¹³³ Mukherjee Haridas & Uma 2000 pp.341-343.

¹³⁴ And, as the previous defense of conversion goes, also commands that other *community* or communities of people be taught this religion.

¹³⁵ However Islamists do not consider Christ to be either God or God's incarnation. Nor do they believe that he was the last prophet.

¹³⁶ They may not say so always. Many people think that there is no non-dogmatic or non-circular way of showing that the religions of other people are false or inferior.

¹³⁷ This is the decisive twist and patently a logical mistake.

¹³⁸ In the Hindu culture and in the Nyāya philosophy we meet with assertions to the effect that he alone understands dharma that approaches it rationally and again that an argument which contradicts the deliverance of direct experience or scripture is a pseudo argument.

¹³⁹ Cf. Anne Besant 2005.

¹⁴⁰ But explicit provision of Jehad is there in the Koran. Cf. 5/6/54.

¹⁴¹ Whether I still end up as a converted person is another issue.

¹⁴² Consideration such as this incline one to suspect the authenticity of the claim that certain passages found in the scripture are really parts of it.

¹⁴³ On one occasion he did say that he would be willing to convert to another religion if he was convinced of the superiority of that religion. But this he seemed to have said for argument's sake.

¹⁴⁴ Vora Niru (complied) 1999 Introduction.

¹⁴⁵ The fact of the matter is that there is evidence in Hindu texts that God *created* dharma. Another point to be considered is if and how much difference is there in the Semitic view between creation and revelation.

¹⁴⁶ However we note that there seems to be visibly remarkable difference in their disposition between Mohammad on the one hand and Buddha or Jesus on the other.

¹⁴⁷ Without which the real and deeper import (tātparya) as against the surface meaning cannot be grasped.

¹⁴⁸ Vātsyāyana said the argument which contradicts the teachings of experience or scripture is a pseudo argument and Manu has said that he alone understands dharma who takes the help of reasoning.

¹⁴⁹ Gandhi in Vora 1999 p.38.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. emphasis added,

¹⁵¹ Without this they would not be permitted to do certain sacred acts. So far śuddhi is an enabling sacramental ritual. This is a rough and ready account but it may suffice for the present.

¹⁵² It is a different act than the act of converting which itself could be independently (perhaps partly) a religiously wrong act.

¹⁵³ This is so according to us as shown above.

¹⁵⁴ (a) This takes care of cases where say a little child or a non-religious person is converted. (b) We should note that religiously it is not all important or at all important whether the person did the wrong in a helpless condition or when he could easily avoid it.

¹⁵⁵ There is no evidence that he searched seriously or in a sustained way.

¹⁵⁶ This sort of argument is not religious. In religious matter such line of secular thinking is hardly of any use.

¹⁵⁷ According to our view and argument presented above both will attract sin, both will act against best of religious sentiment and best of arguments from the nature of God and religion.

¹⁵⁸ However it goes without saying that the persons should be average, normal adult individual.

¹⁵⁹ Theoretically this is not so. For as we said reconversion is a case of conversion and if it is a case of forced reconversion then who reconverts may be wrong. For, he denies a person the freedom to convert. If however the person seeks reconversion then his conversion was notional and reconversion is no better; and it cannot be forced either.

¹⁶⁰ In the authentic Hindu view matters religious or matters of dharma are to be judged as per the provisions of the Scripture or texts which ultimately derive their binding authority from the Scripture (Śruti).

¹⁶¹ See Vora, 1999 p. 32

¹⁶² In fact we have not so much discussed the individual arguments for or against God in any detail. We have discussed more the general issues like the possibility of disproving God and how far it is natural to ask the question about the origin of the world.

¹⁶³ Men who bring the challenges in question agree in their concern for peace and progress of human society. It is to emphasize their characteristic commitment to social cause that we speak of these men as social man.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Feyerabend 1967.

¹⁶⁵ Mukhopadhyay, P. K., 1967 and 1995.

¹⁶⁶ Rorty, R.,

¹⁶⁷ This is the view of Rorty but Dummett also in his own way come to the similar conclusion. See Dummett, M. , 1973 Chap. 19.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Rorty forcefully made this point in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of the World*.

¹⁶⁹ Dummett, M., Frege: *Philosophy of Language*.

¹⁷⁰ Putnam, H. *Collected Essays*.

¹⁷¹ James W., 1902.

¹⁷² Lenin, V. I., 1976 p.411f.

¹⁷³ See Jordan 1963 p. 177.

¹⁷⁴ See Petrovic Gajo p. 274 emphasis added.

¹⁷⁵ One should not jump to the conclusion that Kant had earlier acquaintance with Buddha's teaching.

¹⁷⁶ Greene 1960 pp. lxxiv-v, emphasis added.

¹⁷⁷ Greene 1960 p.lxxvi.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid pp. lxxvii-viii.

¹⁷⁹ We will discuss more about it below.

¹⁸⁰ Greene pp. lxxiii-xxiv emphasis added.

¹⁸¹ To quote from just one randomly chosen journal published in May 1997 "The remarkable religious vitality of a society [America] which supports 2000 different religious denominations, and in which more than 60 percent of the citizens can be found at least once a month in

one of the almost 500,000 churches, temples, and mosques which dot the landscape." *The Religious Landscape of the United States*, an electronic Journal.

¹⁸² Cf. Smith, Huston, *Scientism: The Bedrock of the Modern Worldview*, in Zarandi, M. (Ed.) 2006, pp.233-248.

¹⁸³ We will discuss this point later. However the passage we have in mind is :

"Since there cannot be a scientific explanation of the existence of the universe, either there is a personal explanation or there is no explanation at all. The hypothesis that there is a God is the hypothesis of the existence of the simplest kind of person which there could be." In Swinburne, R., "*Cosmological and Teleological Arguments*" 1992 p. 18 see also Mukhopadhyay, 'Rationality and Religion', 1972.

¹⁸⁴ For example Aṣṭavakra, the author of *Aṣṭavakrasaṃhitā*.

¹⁸⁵ But this is closely related to proving that God has the properties we associate with Him.

¹⁸⁶ ISCON Publication etc.

¹⁸⁷ See Bhattacharya Gopinath 1989 p.216.

¹⁸⁸ Ockham, William of (c.1285 – 1349).

¹⁸⁹ Anselm St., of Canterbury (1033 – 1109).

¹⁹⁰ Descartes, Rene, (1596 – 1650).

¹⁹¹ Plantinga 1978 p.197.

¹⁹² See author's 'Does Time Have a Beginning?', 2009

¹⁹³ Cf. Rorty 1999 p.168-174.

¹⁹⁴ It is vague, we use it to cover both accepting existence of God and accepting certain property or properties of God. We will make this precise later.

¹⁹⁵ Quine, "On What There Is" in his Two Dogmas of Empiricism.

¹⁹⁶ Schick, Thodore Jr., 2008 p.484.

¹⁹⁷ Our point for saying this is not the same as that of Professor Boby Treat. In fact Professor Treat has not explicitly stated what particular mistakes he finds in Schlick's arguments.

¹⁹⁸ Schick, Thodore Jr., 2008 p.484. Emphasis added.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.484, emphasis added.

²⁰⁰ See particularly, Swinburne, Richard., "Cosmological and Teleological Arguments: Criteria for assessing inductive arguments to Good explanation" in Mohapatra et al (Eds.) 1992.

²⁰¹ Ibid p.7.

²⁰² The word must seems to be a slip.

²⁰³ We are using it not in the sense of William James.

²⁰⁴ Mukhopadhyay, 1992 pp.75-76.

²⁰⁵ Treat Bobby, p.488.

²⁰⁶ Ibid p. 490 italics in original.

²⁰⁷ Schick writes, "This may explain why more than 90% of the world's top scientists disbelieve or doubt the existence of god". *Op. cit.* p.486.

Many questions are there. Is this remark based on any systematic survey and statistical report? What criterions he uses to decide who the top scientists are. What would be his opinion if 90% of top philosophers or theologians believe in God?

²⁰⁸ Ibid p.485.

²⁰⁹ See Mukhopadhyay 1967.

²¹⁰ Swinburne, 1992 p.18.

²¹¹ Ibid. p.17.

²¹² Schick 2008 p.487.

²¹³ Ibid p. 486,487.

²¹⁴ Swinburne 1992 p.9.

²¹⁵ Ibid p.9.

²¹⁶ Ibid p.10.

²¹⁷ Ibid p.12.

²¹⁸ This is a central thesis in Nyāya argument for the existence of God. But subtle difference that is there should be noted. Swinburne nearly identifies or confuses the two things consciousness and freedom. Indeed matter does have neither; but the two are not the same. While Nyāya admits man to be conscious it is debatable whether he admits free will of man.

²¹⁹ Believers in anthropic principle of modern scientific cosmology will disagree.

²²⁰ Ibid, p.20.

²²¹ Ibid p.18.

²²² Plantinga, Alvin., 1974 (1978), p.192.

²²³ For little more elaborate treatment of some of these points readers may consult author's paper "Rationality and Religion."

²²⁴ Cf. Mukhopadhyay 2009.

²²⁵ See Mukhopadhyay 'Did Gautama Believe in God?' in *Darsanik Samiksa*, vol. 1, no.2, October, 1969.

²²⁶ R̥ksarīhitā 8/7/17/6, 7, etc.

²²⁷ This does not really follow. So the Indian theological realists hold that as the only supreme creator God creates only those impermanent things which no one else can create.

²²⁸ If we begin with our notion of god and if the conception of God entails in its turn the truth that God is the creator of the universe, then the cosmological argument could hardly be a case of inductive argument.

²²⁹ One may deem it inconsistent with the anthropic principle of modern scientific cosmology.

²³⁰ There are indeed moments when they are happy and enjoy pleasures. But discerning men at least cannot but be unhappy thinking that any state of pleasure or happiness is sure to be followed by the state of unhappiness when the pleasure will be over. So there is no unmixed happiness. Since pleasures are also sought through by impending sorrow the world is full of sorrow.

²³¹ “Aśesha duḥkhamaya jagat” etc. Nyāyakusumānjaliḥ chapter 1

²³² Udayana’s example of eternal thing is time or Kāla and the like.

²³³ Even so they are real. Under this condition in spite of all the real happiness which man may experience the world is not a place of happiness alone.

²³⁴ We owe this beautiful and perceptive expression to Professor Gopinath Bhattacharya. Our exposition of the nature of Indian rationality elsewhere could be taken as the necessary commentary on this idea.

²³⁵ Bhattacharya, Gopinath, *Theism and Antitheistic Theories in Indian Philosophy* in Bhattacharya Gopinath 1989 pp.173-188.

²³⁶ Madhyama parimāṇa.

²³⁷ In recent times this point has been noted by Swinburne.

²³⁸ Though unscientific and non-scientific are different.

²³⁹ We ignore that there are as of today some incompleteness in the scientific explanations of creation.

²⁴⁰ Mukhopadhyay, P.K. 2009 pp. 23-92.

²⁴¹ We do not consider usual the view of those who think that philosophy is not a factual study and it cannot have truth claim.

²⁴² This is different from the view according to which philosophy issues in definitions and provides analysis of concerned language in respect of its meaningfulness and meaning. The crucial difference is that in our view philosophy like science seeks, finds and deals with truth.

²⁴³ This may be contested. Quite frequently men of vision are called by the name philosopher. Some also consciously maintain that there is a kind of philosophy which is called intuitive philosophy. Sri Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan etc. found that this sort of Philosophy is most suitable in the context of religious or spiritual pursuit or thinking. We believe that even edifying metaphysical philosophy should be a sort of rational and logical elaboration of whatever intuition or intuitive vision they might begin with.

²⁴⁴ Linguistic philosophers who think philosophy is not a factual study but an exercise in conceptual analysis, and that philosophy issues in definitions would say philosophy is not concerned with truth but only with meaning.

²⁴⁵ We have already discussed the real position of Kant in the matter.

²⁴⁶ We did it with reference to Kant before.

²⁴⁷ See Burr 2008 p.106.

²⁴⁸ Burr pp.106-07 emphasis added.

²⁴⁹ The Gītā 6/40.

²⁵⁰ Plato, "Apology" Jowett's translation.

²⁵¹ See Rorty 1999 p.158.

²⁵² For before Dewey there was no systematic and decisive shift from the individual to the social. See Kolakowski 1972 p.198ff.

²⁵³ Ibid p.193.

²⁵⁴ Such a view appears to be cynical when compared and contrasted with the quoted passages from "Apology".

²⁵⁵ A realist philosopher denies this sharp distinction between external facts and internal experience or between description and expression.

²⁵⁶ He very early in his life revolted against Catholic Christianity but later he not only developed a religion but the structure of his positivist religion is largely a replication of Catholicism. See Kolakowski 1972 p. 80f.

²⁵⁷ Ibid p. 80.

²⁵⁸ Rorty 1999 p.xii.

²⁵⁹ Scholars whose work contributed this project piece meal in the past include Udayanācārya, Śāmkaramiśra, Rakhal das Nyāyaratna to name a few.

²⁶⁰ In another context GNB distinguished between genuine mysticism and pseudo mysticism.

²⁶¹ Often they are not educated in the conventional way and are usually withdrawn. What goes in the non-communicability of mystic experience is often the lack on the part of the mystics any desire to communicate.

²⁶² Cf. Bhattacharya, Swati.

²⁶³ See Bhattacharya.

²⁶⁴ According to the realist school of Nyāya a philosophical enterprise seeks to generate correct knowledge of the true nature of the thing it

discusses (tattvanirṇaya) chiefly through three methods of which one is definition or *lakṣaṇa*.

²⁶⁵ Theories which can boast of offering precise definition deal with phenomena which are far less complex.

²⁶⁶ In the history this latter conflict bears especial reference to some of the Semitic religions. Some of the recent views and opinions of the Canadian scholar cum activist Tarek Fatah as well as some of the movements he is spearheading are worth discussing. Unfortunately we have no scope for that. In a recent interview in India (Times of India, Lucknow edition dated 19.04.2013) Mr. Fatah discussed some of these points..

²⁶⁷ As a negative example we may refer to Woodroffe's definition.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Does Time Have a Beginning?

²⁶⁹ The funder is either a non-religious or irreligious man or is a member of some prevailing religion till he founded his own religion. It is still better to view the situation in this way. His disciples found a new religion and make their preceptor, guru, its founder. It is only in some such sense that Gautama Buddha became the founder of Buddhist religion, the first members of which were the founding disciples.

²⁷⁰ Such things happened it is said in case of persons like Jadu Krishnamurti.

²⁷¹ Theoretically speaking there may be some time gap as God is said to have created dharma *after* creating the universe. See the Bhāṣya of

Śaṅkarācārya on the Gītā. But certainly there was no within that duration; at least dharma was there before *men* were born.

²⁷² But such a man is rarely conscious of or explicitly aware of the fact that he has a religion.

²⁷³ It has been said that in some such sense of dissatisfaction art or poetry is born. It has been said art is man's gallant protest against the crudities of nature.

²⁷⁴ This is roughly the line of reasoning one finds in the Yogadarśana .

²⁷⁵ The force or power that keeps even otherwise discerning men forgetful of it called Mahāmāya who man can worship for greatest benefit.

²⁷⁶ Incidentally there is a beautiful book about the life of a saintly lady and who she believed to be God incarnate, her guru, Ma Ānandamayee. The title of the book is *Death must die*.

²⁷⁷ Paramācārya Chandraśekharendra Sarasvati in recent times gave much importance to this feature of Hinduism and drew our attention to it.

²⁷⁸ The same hold in case of Islam which was founded with the explicit awareness of the presence of other two major Semitic religions as is so well documented in the pages of the holy Koran.

²⁷⁹ Works of Debiprasad Chattopadhyay and Amartya Sen largely substantiate this remark.

²⁸⁰ Even if people are convinced it will not serve the purpose of religion or religious practitioners, they need an actual or real divine person, not just an explanatory principle.

²⁸¹ Radhakrishnan and Muirhead (eds.) 1936.

²⁸² At many places Bankim highlighted the importance of emotion or bhakti. There are many passages throughout his work which may be cited. We may at random refer to the last but four sentences of his novel Krṣṇakānter will.

²⁸³ The Gītā says Yam labdhyā nāparam lābhām etc.

²⁸⁴ Chesterton.

²⁸⁵ For one thing, those will be all impermanent.

²⁸⁶ Mṛto hi ko assay punarnamṛtyu.

²⁸⁷ We avoid the discussion of the more complicated debate between those who think that the earlier state of dissatisfaction was sort of imaginary and those who think it is real. See Swati.

²⁸⁸ The order and organization of monks and hermits or sannayins are aberration rather than rule. Origin of these may be traced to induction of people who are not fully eligible for the life in question or to motive which is not strictly religious in nature or religiously important.

²⁸⁹ Some people contest this assertion and say that the word scripture does not apply to the Veda which is an oral text or Śruti. But this is a weak argument to say the least.

²⁹⁰ In the discipline of Mīmāṁsā.

²⁹¹ In recent times the word Veda is sometimes taken to mean only that portion of the Vaidika corpus which consists of the Mantra or collection of mantra portion called Saṁhitā.

²⁹² There is a suggested irony. The nāstika Bauddha-s have pauruṣeya scripture some āstika-s, Mīmāṃsakas have only apauruṣeya scripture.

²⁹³ Bhattacharya 1989.

²⁹⁴ It is sometimes pointed out that Hinduism is itself a non-theistic religion if the Mīmāṃsaka-s are to be believed. But this is a popular view which deserves serious consideration. First there is nothing in the conception of theistic notion of God that He must be a creator, some Mīmāṃsakas accept even creator God, Mimāṃsā denial of a personal God was to ensure the autonomy or karma and strong theory of apauruṣeyata of the Veda. Many such necessary issue are involved which cannot be discussed here.

²⁹⁵ This is due more to the stronger personal allegiance, loyalty, love or respect to the person Buddha than to theoretical objections against certain features or provisions of Hinduism.

²⁹⁶ This institution is much abused in modern times and invites strong criticisms from people of modern temperament. However, by way of confirming our view that modern men are very ambivalent, many modern intellectuals in urban areas are found to display great admiration and allegiance for men known in the society as gurus or godmen even when they are not their guru in the official sense. Often these gurus do not fulfill the qualifications that have been specified in the authentic religious literature for gurus.

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